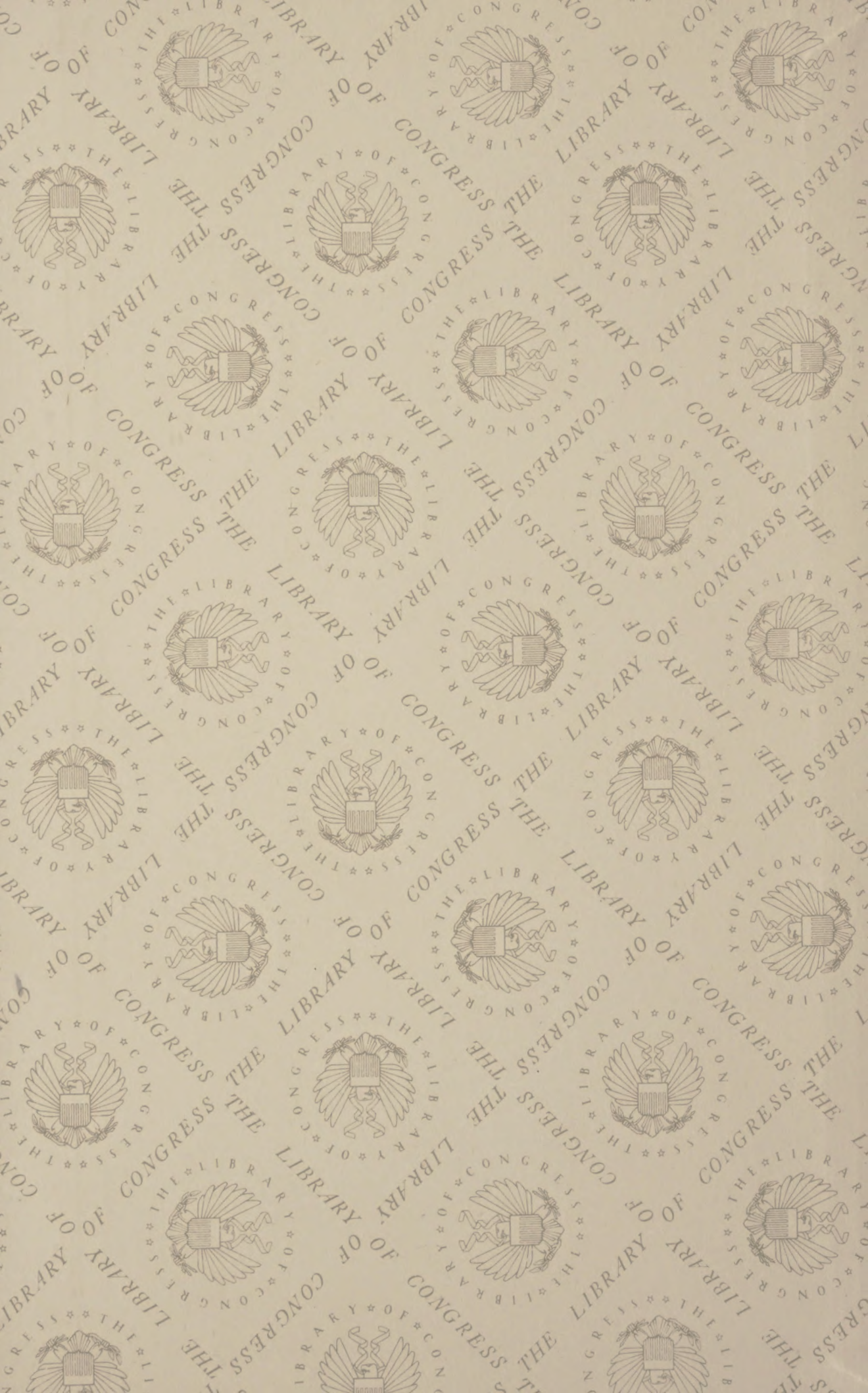






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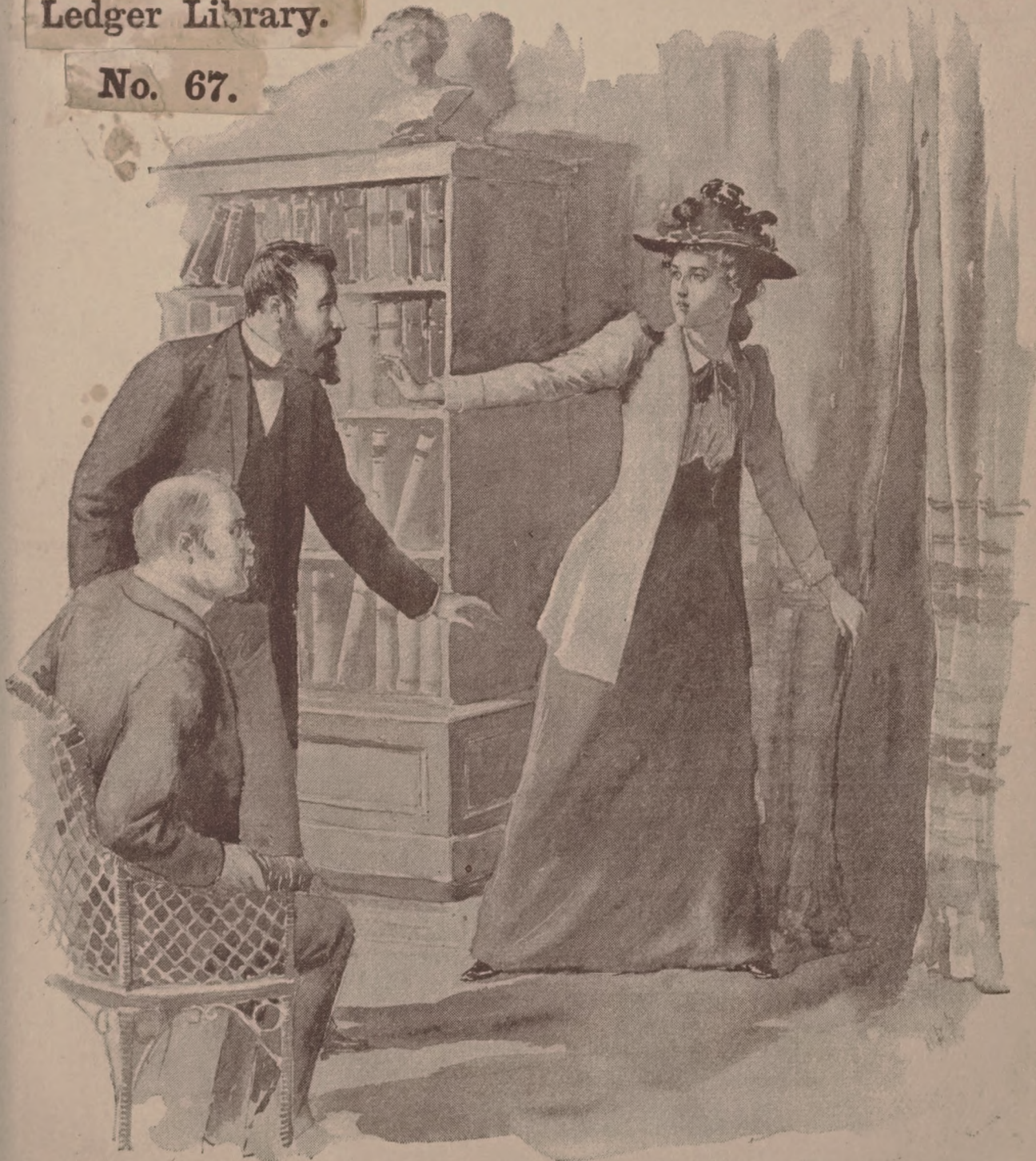
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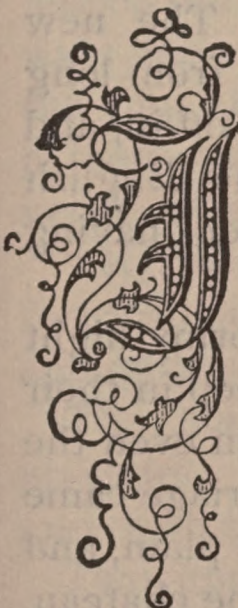
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BEATRIX ROHAN.

CHAPTER I.

BEATRIX.



IN the northern part of Belgium, in the province of Anvers, in the midst of a vast, dreary, and monotonous plain, dotted here and there with windmills and intersected with ditches, stands a grim and lonely old chateau. It is surrounded with wide, old-fashioned gardens and court-yards, and these are encircled by a brick wall, twelve feet in height. The mansion, which has borne from time immemorial the name of the Chateau Valbeck, belongs to an ancient Flemish family, the present representative of which is a boy at school. His guardians, with a view to his enrichment, have leased the two hundred acres of flat lands, comprising the main portion of the estate, to a little agricultural colony, and wheat fields, cabbage-plots, and grazing pastures, divided by ditches, are

spread on every hand, and present the appearance of an immense garden. The chateau, with its few acres of grounds, sometimes finds a tenant for a few months, but is more often unoccupied.

Some two or three years ago, the agents of the young Count Valbeck, residing at Antwerp, received a call from an English gentleman, who desired to hire the chateau for one year. In lieu of giving references, he paid a year's rent in advance. He then procured a staff of Flemish servants and himself accompanied them to his new residence, where he established them. The season was early spring. Already the plain around the dwelling was beginning to display patches of various shades of green; already the flats were dotted with busy laborers; and the wind-mills plied solemnly through the lengthening days. The new tenant found the dwelling chill and damp from long disuse. A great store of Hainault coal was laid in, and fires were kindled in all the rooms. The English gentleman remained several days, and then, having made the house habitable, he went away.

A week later, in the dead of a dark and stormy night when the colonists were all housed and asleep in their hamlet at the farther edge of the estate, when even the servants were in bed, a close traveling carriage came swiftly along the narrow road threading the plain, and drew up before the massive gateway of the chateau. A servant, a stupid-looking Fleming, dismounted from the box and pulled the bell violently. He was obliged to repeat the summons many times before a light glimmered through one of the windows of the chateau, and the old Fleming housekeeper put up the sash and demanded shrilly what was wanted.

"The master is come!" was the answer. "Let us in!"

The housekeeper disappeared from view, and the light vanished with her. The English gentleman put his head out of the coach window and muttered imprecations. The wind blew fiercely across the moor-like expanse, and the rain fell in solid sheets. At length, through the pitchy darkness, came the sound of an opening door, the clatter of wooden sabots upon the paved court-yard, the rattling of bolts, bars, and chains and then the great gates swung open, and a wide-mouthed, shock-headed stable-boy, with a lantern held high above his head, gave them admittance.

The coach rattled into the yard and drew up in the close-covered porch. The house-door opened and the housekeeper, in petticoat and short-gown, and with a candle in her hand, appeared on the threshold. The English gentleman emerged from the carriage and helped out a lady, who ran up the steps and entered the wide hall. A second gentleman, evidently the son of the first, then alighted, and both—father and son—helped out a fourth passenger, a slender girl, heavily veiled, who appeared to be nearly helpless.

“My niece,” said the lady, as the housekeeper bent forward, her face full of curiosity. “She is an invalid, and quite exhausted. Lead the way to her rooms!”

The housekeeper, bearing the light, led the way up-stairs. The lady followed. After her came the two men with their limp burden.

Two upper rooms had been prepared especially for the young lady—the “invalid niece.” She was carried into one of them, and the housekeeper dismissed for the night.

The next morning the gentleman who had hired the house, and whose name was Colonel Brand, made his appearance at the breakfast-table, accompanied by his wife. The son, Randal Brand, sauntered in a little later.

The "invalid niece" did not make her appearance either then or thereafter, during the days that followed. No servant in the house ever saw her face. She never quitted her rooms, and it was found that the doors were always locked. Mrs. Brand waited upon her young charge personally, and no servant had even a chance to listen at the closed doors.

At the end of a week, the girl's existence had come to be regarded by all the servants, save the housekeeper and the coachman, as apocryphal. And even those two, who had looked upon her shrouded, helpless figure and veiled face, gave little thought to the mysterious girl. They were stolid Flemings, nearly devoid of curiosity, dull and stupid to excess, and they accepted the state of affairs in the household as if it had been the most natural in existence. They never inquired after the "invalid niece;" they even avoided speaking among themselves of her after Mrs. Brand had once hinted that her young relative was "not quite right in her mind." Indeed, from the hour of that communication, they felt an awe and terror of the "invalid," as if she had been a beast of prey intent upon their destruction.

The week was followed by other weeks, until a month had passed away. The April days, full of sunshine and warmth, had come. The level plain around the chateau was growing greener every day, and presented more than ever a garden-like aspect. And still, although a month had passed since her arrival, the mysterious girl had not crossed the threshold of her chamber.

One night—a night very like to that on which the tenants of the Chateau Valbeck had taken possession of their domicil—a night wild with storm and wailing winds, the three Brands, father, mother and son, were gathered in the ancient drawing-room around the cavernous hearth, conversing together in cautious whis-

pers, now and then involuntarily glancing over their shoulders as if they feared being overheard by some intruding servant.

Up stairs, locked in her own rooms, the "invalid niece" was walking her floor.

Her apartments were two in number, connected by folding-doors. The inner room was bedchamber and bath in one. The outer room was wainscoted from floor to ceiling with oak, darkened by time to the hue of ebony. The effect was depressing and gloomy in the extreme, and was not to be counteracted by the thick crimson carpet on the floor, the easy-chair before the hearth, or the glowing coal-fire whose red lances of light half illumined the chamber.

There were no books to be seen, no pictures, no sewing materials. Only the scanty supply of solid furniture and the ruddy fire redeemed the place from absolute bareness.

The windows, however, were heavily curtained with faded damask. Behind the thick flowing folds were hidden bars of iron, that made the rooms a veritable prison.

These apartments had once served as the nursery of the Valbeck children, and the window-gratings had been put in in their day to secure them against possible accidents. These stout bars served another purpose now.

There was no taint of madness about the girl who paced her room with swift, impetuous tread—no trace of invalidism in her elastic movements, or in her countenance.

She was strikingly beautiful, with a pale, clear complexion, which was yet not palid. Her forehead was broad and low, and from it was carelessly brushed away massive waves of tawny, burnished hair. Her eyes

were large, of darkest gray—almost black—deep and luminous, with slumbering fire in their dusky depths. She possessed a mouth of rare sweetness and tenderness ; a slim, swaying figure, instinct with grace. Her strength of intellect, her beauty of soul, her loveliness of disposition, it was easy to see, equalled her remarkable personal attractions.

She continued to move to and fro, with the grace of a leopardess, pausing at every turn to listen.

“Why don’t she come?” she whispered. “If she would only come and go! I shall not dare make any attempt at escape until I am rid of her for the night.”

She turned toward the window, but paused, hearing a muffled tread in the corridor without. Then a key grated in the lock, and Mrs. Brand entered.

The lady bore a tray, on which was a crust of bread and a glass of water. She deposited her burden upon a small table close at hand, and stood just within the threshold, her hand upon the door, which she closed behind her.

Then she contemplated the girl with keen, cold eyes, as if she sought to read her soul.

Mrs. Brand was past middle age, and was a large, portly, arrogant woman, with flushed face, a row of gray puffs of hair on either side of her narrow forehead, a long, hooked nose, and thin lips set firmly together in a most disagreeable and determined expression. One might search in vain her haughty countenance for one gleam of womanly kindness. She was hard and selfish and unscrupulous to the very core of her being.

“What is your answer to-night, Beatrix?” she asked, in a cold, monotonous voice, as if repeating a question she had asked a hundred times before.

“The same as this morning—as last night—as last

week—as every day since you brought me to this prison—no, *no*—a thousand times *no* !” declared the girl, her eyes flashing, her passionate young voice ringing out stern and decisive.

Ordinarily, having heard that answer, the woman would have departed. But to-night she lingered. She had something more to say.

“Beatrix,” she said, slowly, a cat-like gleam in her dull eyes, “you don’t know what you are fighting against. You are only a girl of twenty, ignorant of the world ; you have been petted and pampered all your life ; you are in most things a mere child. And we three are pitted against you—we three who know the world, who are bold and daring, who mean to subdue you and bend you to our will, or—”

“Or kill me !” cried the girl, impulsively.

The woman smiled—a strange, slow, repulsive smile. The girl saw the smile and shuddered.

“The end must be submission—or death !” said Mrs. Brand, after a brief pause. “You have said it, Beatrix.”

“I will never submit—never ! I will die first !” exclaimed the girl, her face growing whiter, her gray eyes glowing with a steady, dusky light. Mrs. Brand—I will never call you aunt again—you shall triumph only in my death. And if I die from your persecutions, my blood shall be upon your head for evermore. In the day when you and your husband shall stand at the bar of judgment, how shall you answer for your guardianship of the orphan niece committed to your care ? My father thought when, dying, he entrusted me to your charge—you, his only sister and surviving relative—that he was securing my happiness. Ah, if he had only foreseen what should come !”

“But he did not foresee !” said Mrs. Brand, with a

sneering smile. "I and my husband are the lawful guardians of your person, Beatrix Rohan, until you marry, or reach the age of twenty-one. You are not very likely to marry within the coming year, unless you marry my son. You have never entered society ; you have never had a lover. You certainly will not have opportunity to form acquaintances here. For a year longer you belong to us, and are completely under our control. You are buried alive in this grim old house. There is not a person on earth to seek you out or inquire after you. If you die here, there is no one to ask how you died. The trustees of your property never trouble their heads about you. You are utterly helpless. You have been shut up here a month—"

"Yes," interrupted the girl ; "and for a month I have heard no voice but yours. I have seen no face but yours during that time, save once or twice the mocking visage of your husband or son peering in at the door. You have heaped insults upon me. You have fed me upon bread and water. See how thin I am grown," and she pushed back the sleeve from her arm. "You have refused me books, newspapers, my needle even. You have been cruel, insulting, threatening ; you, my own aunt, the woman who promised my dying father to be a mother to me. But you have not conquered me. That, thank God, you can never do !"

The girl's eyes flashed with her mighty indignation ; her exquisite face glowed with aroused spirit.

The woman regarded her for a few moments in silence, and then said in a smoother voice :

"You must be tired of this solitude, this prison fare, this dreary idleness, Beatrix. You must pine for your out-door walks, for freedom to come and go at will, for a sight of other faces. Down stairs there is light of candles, a piano, books, and presently dinner will be

served—a dinner with soups and meat and wine. I know you are hungry and faint from want of food. Will you dine with us? You have only to promise to marry your Cousin Randall in a week's time—"

"I will not promise!"

"You will marry him—*or die!*" said Mrs. Brand, in a hissing voice, and with eyes that now glittered evilly, while her florid face darkened. "We are poor and in difficulties. We have luxurious tastes, a position in society, and no money. You are a great heiress. Your father inherited a fortune, and married a fortune. I had money of my own, but we spent that long ago. If you should die before you reach the age of twenty-one your fortune would come to me, your father's sister, and his natural heir after yourself. I am persuaded, Beatrice, that you will die before you attain your majority—unless you become the wife of my son, Randal."

There was a depth of hideous meaning in the woman's voice, a frightful malignity in her eyes. It was as if for an instant the mask had been stripped from her wicked nature, and all her evil purposes were unvailed.

The girl did not answer; she could not. But the whiteness of her pure and noble face, the horror in her dilating eyes, attested that she comprehended the awful design of her kinswoman.

"To-morrow," continued Mrs. Brand, still in that fierce, sibilant voice, "your food will be diminished one-third in quantity. When your fire goes out to-night, it will not be relighted. We begin now more rigorous measures, you see. We shall soon break your haughty spirit! Hunger and damp and cold will inevitably bring you to your senses—*or to your grave!*"

"Life with Randal Brand would be a living death," said the girl, slowly. "From his boyhood it was his delight to torture all dumb creatures—to oppress the

helpless—to injure the defenceless. I have seen him pull the wings from flies, in his savage love of inflicting pain—I have seen him kill my favorite kittens, and he laughed at my frantic struggles to save them, my pleadings and distress—I have seen him beat his horse until the animal was goaded almost to madness. I have seen him throw down in the street, in pretended accident, but purposely, a poor crippled old man. It is not three years since he covered my dog with oil and set him on fire—I hear Fido's howls of agony still! He delighted to torture even me, a little helpless child. And this is the man you would force me to marry! A man with the soul of a savage! A man with the nature of a wolf! I hate him—I loathe him! I should die if I were to marry him. Better death by lingering torture before marriage than after!"

"You will change your mind in the course of another week!" exclaimed Mrs. Brand, with a disagreeable laugh. "A crust of bread only for a day's sustenance will soon weaken both your body and mind. I can see how you have changed within this past month. You have not half the physical strength you had a month ago. We had to drug you, from the moment we landed in Belgium, to keep you quiet. You will be quiet enough very soon. It is April weather outside, but these stone walls are full of winter damps and chills. Two days without a fire, and your body will be racked with pains. If already you are so weakened with meagre and insufficient food, how long shall you be able to stand cold and hunger? But enough for to-night. To-morrow night, when I repeat my usual question, I shall expect a different answer."

Without another word, but with an evilly gloating expression, a smile of sinister triumph, Mrs. Brand withdrew, and the door shut and locked behind her.



"YOU ARE TOO YOUNG TO BE WANDERING ABOUT IN THIS MANNER, ALONE."—*See Page 55.*



CHAPTER II.

LOST !

When the sound of her enemy's steps in the corridor without had died away, the girl sank down upon her knees before the hearth and buried her face in the cushions of the easy-chair. So young—so delicately nurtured—beautiful as a vision—the heiress of immense wealth—what a fate was hers ! In the minutes that followed, her young soul besought God, with a bitter and passionate pleading, to befriend her,—to guard her, and to guide and to help her in the attempt she must make this very night to escape from the toils of her enemies.

She arose at last, and ate the crust of bread which Mrs. Brand had brought to her, although her palate almost refused it.

"If I do not effect my escape this very night," she said to herself, "I must give over the project forever. This solitude and starvation are killing me ! I am weaker than I was yesterday ; I was weaker then than upon the day previous ! Mrs. Brand is right. I cannot bear this torture another week ! Surely, I shall succeed in loosening the bars to-night."

She crept to the door and listened. All was still as

death outside. She hung a shawl upon the door-knob in a manner to cover the key-hole, and then stole to the yawning chimney and thrust one arm up into its black ascent. When she withdrew her hand she held in it a dinner knife, its originally white handle blackened with soot, its blade worn and jagged and broken. She eyed the weapon lovingly.

Upon the day subsequent to her arrival at the Chateau Valbeck, this knife, then whole, had been brought upon her tray with her dinner of meat. She had hidden the knife in the chimney, and not all the searches of Mrs. Brand had availed to find it. The woman had firmly concluded that she had not taken a knife to the prisoner's chamber, but she had reduced the girl's diet immediately to a crust of bread and a glass of water, and had been careful never to convey even a spoon into the prisoner's room.

Beatrice, knife in hand, stole like a shadow to one of the windows, lifted the curtains, and climbed into the deep, high window seat.

Night after night, with her waning strength, she had toiled at the stout window bars with that broken knife, while her enemies slept. She had loosened two bars in their sockets in the stout oaken frame. Could she remove them entirely to-night? She went to work, with white face and lips set sternly, nerved by an awful desperation.

Outside was life. Inside death lurked for her. She could not die! She was so young; life might be so sweet; even a bare existence which should be unmenaced by her enemies, had charms for her. She must escape!

Listening now and then, her heart seeming to stand still at every sound, she toiled desperately. At length, weak and trembling, she rested her forehead upon one of the cold prison bars. And now for the first time she

was conscious of the storm outside. How the wind blew? How the rain fell? It was a terrible night, the elements raging with all the fury of unloosed demons.

"An awful storm!" shuddered the girl. "Yet I must escape to-night, if at all. The very storm will befriend me. The servants will be all housed. And any noise I may make in escaping will not be noticed."

She resumed her task. She had advanced her work upon the previous night to such a state of forwardness that she had thought a single half-hour's labor would be sufficient to remove the two bars. But it was a full hour before the first bar was wrenched from its socket by her tensely-nerved hands, and a quarter of an hour afterwards before the second bar was removed.

She sank down then weak and trembling. For many minutes she was deathly still. Her white face, upon which a single red gleam from the fire rested, looked as if she had fainted.

After a little she stirred, gathered herself up feebly and crept down from the window-seat. She listened at the door. Then she went to her wardrobe, and took out an entire suit of warm clothing, and with quivering hands, proceeded to dress herself. A dark blue serge dress replaced the light cashmere gown she had been wearing. She put on also, a long sleeved and belted blue waterproof cloak, a large cape of similar material, a straw hat, and over that the hood of her cloak.

Her movements were slow and cautious in the extreme. Fully attired for her perilous adventure, with high, thick boots protected by rubber overshoes, with gloves in her pocket, the girl next packed a small hand-bag with a change of linen, and with all her jewelry, and tied it securely about her waist.

Her purse was in her bosom, where for days she had carried it in order to insure its safety. It contained the

half-yearly allowance of money entire, as she had received it from the guardians of her estate six weeks before.

She was now ready for her flight. She produced from its hiding-place in one of her trunks a stout rope which she had secretly made during her imprisonment. It had been formed out of her clothing, torn in strips and braided, and was strong enough to support her light weight. It was heavily knotted at intervals of a few inches.

The girl picked up the fire-poker—a long bar of iron with a hooked end, which by long use and misuse bore a striking resemblance to a reaping-hook, and secured it to her person.

“I may need it in self-defence,” she thought. “It is a better weapon than the knife. It will serve me also in scaling the wall.”

She climbed again into the window-seat, and essayed to push up the window. It was secured by an old-fashioned spring-catch, and yielded to her pressure. She then opened with difficulty the heavy wooden shutters. The rain now beat in in torrents.

Beatrix had taken the precaution to cover the fire, and all was dark behind as well as before her. She put out her head and tried to pierce the gloom with her great luminous eyes.

Upon the day succeeding her arrival at the Chateau Valbeck, Mrs. Brand had rehearsed to her the loneliness of the place and its defences, including the twelve-foot brick wall, which enclosed the entire premises. Through a crevice in the blank wooden shutters covering her windows, Beatrix had studied the defences of the place, day after day. It was well that she had done so. In this impenetrable gloom, eyesight was but a mockery.

"I cannot see my hand before my face," she thought. "How am I to get clear of all this peril? I can only do my best. Surely God will help me!"

She secured one end of the rope to the stout iron bars still remaining in the window-frame, and dropped the coil, slowly and cautiously, outside. Then, with a wild prayer to heaven, she crept out of the window, and clinging to the knotted rope, swung herself out into the black and howling space.

It seemed to Beatrix that years and ages were passed in her descent from her prison to the ground. The wind tore at her swaying figure as with cruel hands. The rain bore down upon her in pelting torrents. The rope swayed with her light weight. Her hands clung desperately to the great rough knots, and it seemed as if her weak wrists and weak muscles must give way and she be precipitated to the earth. And then she fancied that her enemies were waiting for her below—that every foot of descent brought her nearer to them—and her heart beat with great suffocating throbs, and the thick darkness covered her eyes.

It was a terrible experience, but foot by foot she neared the solid earth. The rope swayed more and more with her weight, and suddenly gave way or became unfastened at the top, and she went heavily down.

She had a fall of only two or three feet, but she fell prostrate, and so lay for some moments, the rope coiling around her like a serpent. Finding that she was unhurt, she arose, at last, to her feet, and stood quite still, endeavoring to look around her.

She could see nothing. She must grope her way to the wall as best she could, for her keenest glances could not detect its outline. Remembering its height, and that the gates must be locked, she picked up her rope,

thinking that it might possibly prove of use in scaling the outer enclosure.

Then, with one hand against the old stone chateau, she advanced through the gloom for some distance and abruptly turned the angle of the building.

Here she paused and hesitated.

A light streamed out from a window scarcely a foot further on. From her halting-place, the girl, by bending forward, could look into the big old drawing-room. She did so.

The old-fashioned apartment was long and low and very gloomy in its black wainscoting, its dark carpet, its faded brown chairs. Candles burned on the high mantelpiece. Before the cavernous hearth, as at an earlier hour of the same evening, the three Brands, father, mother and son, sat together, plotting in whispers against the liberty—the life even—of that crouching girl outside in the storm.

They were the nearest—the only—relatives of poor Beatrix. She feared and hated them all alike. Seeing them now, with the red glow of the fire-shine on their faces, she watched them with a sense of fascination.

Mrs. Brand sat at one corner of the hearth, which was heaped with peat or other fuel in square brick shape, her cruel, arrogant face turned toward her husband, who sat opposite her.

Colonel Brand presented a strong contrast to his portly wife. He was thin, with sharp, hatchet features, a low, retreating forehead, small, black, ferret eyes, a long, thin nose, and a heavy beard. There was something decidedly sinister in his appearance. He seemed to be a man who would stop at nothing where his own interest was concerned.

The son Randall Brand, sat between the two, his face half-turned toward the window. He was the worthy

son of his parents. He was not ill-looking, but there was that in his countenance that would have made a keen observer fear him. He was about five-and-twenty ; his face was large, round, smooth-shaven, and singularly yellow in tint ; his small eyes, set under overhanging brows, gleamed like serpents' eyes ; his massive jaws were square and firmly set ; and his wide, heavy mouth, with hanging under-lip, had a cruel, greedy expression. He was not tall, but was heavily built. His appearance, to one versed in the study of human nature, was emphatically that of a dangerous man.

This was the husband her relatives had chosen for poor, noble, innocent Beatrix ! This the husband whom they offered her as the only alternative of death !

The girl thrilled with her anger and repugnance. She trembled lest those hateful eyes should spy her in the blackness outside. She started back and began a hasty retreat across the paved court-yard, her eyes fixed upon the light streaming from the window.

Before she had begun to speculate upon the position of the garden wall she had come upon it with some force. She had not yet put on her gloves, and her bare and bleeding hand came in contact with the bricks. That contact thrilled her.

On the other side of the wall lay freedom and comparative safety. If she could only reach it !

She moved along like a shadow until she came to the gate. It was locked, as she expected, and the key was gone.

Nothing remained but to attempt to scale the enclosure. Remembering the bent poker, she attached it to the rope.

While she halted there deliberating, the rope ladder in her hands, a sudden sound of terror smote upon her hearing—the barking of a watch-dog.

For a moment she stood paralyzed. The sound grew louder—nearer.

The dog was bounding toward her through the storm and blackness !

No time for delay, for shrinking, for crouching in the shadows.

With a rapidity and quick-wittedness born of her desperate situation, she took the hook-like iron attached to her ladder in her hand and flung it up in the air. It fell back upon her. She threw it again—again—and yet again.

The dog was coming nearer, his angry barks filling the air. Oh, heaven, must she be discovered now ? Again the bent iron went whizzing through the air. The hooked end caught in the top of the wall. Merciful Heaven, it was fast and firm ! The knotted rope hung straight and taut in her grasp.

But how near the dog was now. Beatrix clutched the rope with frantic energy ; she climbed it, hand over hand, in an agony of terror ; she stood upon the summit of the wall.

And now the dog was almost beneath her, and his clamor was arousing the inmates of the chateau.

The girl crouched low on her perilous perch, and catching up the knotted rope, flung it upon the outward side of the enclosure. Then she descended it swiftly and gained the ground.

And not too soon.

As she sped over the narrow road, not knowing even that it was a road, and kept within its bounds by the low hedge that bordered it on either side, sounds of confusion came from the chateau. She fancied that the dog increased its noise, that doors opened and shut, and that voices were calling through the night.

She was right. The barking of the watch-dog had

inspired the Brands with fear that some intruder was within the chateau grounds. No one could enter them clandestinely from without. Colonel Brand, with a sudden fear, sped up the stairs with the key to the prisoner's room in his hand. He opened the door. The prisoner was flown.

Then came swift pursuit.

Beatrix, already some rods away, heard them coming. To be overtaken would be death, or worse than death. She sped on like a mad creature. Weak? She had the strength of a lioness, it seemed. Faint from long fasting? Ah! every nerve was keenly strung, was tense and firm. Her feet seemed winged. Safety, life, before her. Death, or that worse fate behind her. She flew on in the storm, and after her came her enemies.

Her factitious strength was fleeting. A mile of distance, and she grew weak with startling suddenness. Her feet seemed weighted. She could run no longer. Her heart beat to suffocating. With a wild cry of despair she fell by the grassy roadside.

And now through the gloom and lessening rain she heard plainly her pursuers. They had put horses to a wagon and were following her at hot speed. How swiftly they came! Their hoarse voices seemed to stun her. The glare of their great red lanterns illumined the road on both sides of them as they hurried toward her! A minute more and they would be upon her!

"Oh, God!" the very soul of tortured Beatrix cried out in her agony. "I am lost! I am lost!"



CHAPTER III.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

There was no hope left in Beatrix Rohan, as, lying on the grassy roadside, her head uplifted a few inches from the ground, she heard the swift approach of her pursuers. To rise and resume her flight was impossible. Her strength was gone. To lie there and be taken captive was to meet a fate worse than death. Her brain was in a whirl. Her heart deafened her with its loud beating. She could not think or reason.

It was instinct then, mere animal instinct, that made her drag herself away on her hands and knees to the bordering hedge. She pushed her way through the bushes, and fell upon the other side, bleeding and torn, and the thorn-branches swept back into their former place and concealed her.

She held her breath and lay still as death as her enemies swept by in their wagon. The big Belgian horse had a bell attached to his harness. Colonel Brand sat at one side of the vehicle, a big red lantern held high above his head, its light illumining the roadside, and Randall Brand sat upon the opposite side—the side nearest Beatrix—his yellow face and fierce eyes glowing with a look that was absolutely savage—while he, bearing a red lantern also, scanned the wayside with furious, devouring glances.

"She can't have gone much farther," Beatrix heard the smooth, hateful voice of Colonel Brand saying. "We shall overtake her before she reaches the cross-road. She shall pay dearly for this escapade—"

The vehicle rolled on, and the voice of her guardian was drowned in the noise of the wheels and the roar of the storm.

They had passed! Beatrix lay in the shelter of the close hedge, and a long blank succeeded. She never knew whether she swooned into a complete unconsciousness, or whether sleep suddenly descended upon her in her utter exhaustion and held her prisoner, but she was like one dead during the hour that followed.

At last, however, the slim figure quivered in the darkness and the great luminous eyes opened once more. The girl, bewildered, trembling and frightened, rose to her elbow and listened.

The storm had greatly abated. The wind had lost much of its fierceness. The rain still fell, but slowly, steadily. No sound of wagon-wheels on the rudely-paved road: no red glare of lanterns through the gloom: no calling of voices, penetrated to the girl's sharpened senses.

She arose to her feet. Something of her strength had come back to her; hope and courage were awakening to new life within her. Perhaps she might escape after all?

"I must be within two miles of the chateau," she said to herself, "I must be far from here before morning. Perhaps even now they are returning. They may suspect that I have hidden under the hedge and search for me. I dare not cross the fields on account of the ditches. I must keep to the road, and at the first sign of their approach push through the hedge again. I can hide in a ditch if the worst comes."

She crept through the hedge again and found herself in the paved road. She could see afar off in the gloom the lights of the Chateau Valbeck, and knew how to direct her course. She plodded onward wearily, wrapped in her water-proof cloak and hood. In the course of fifteen minutes she had arrived at the cross-road of which Colonel Brand had spoken.

Here she paused.

It was plain that her pursuers had taken one of the three roads opening out before her, their hedged outlines now just perceptible in the lightening gloom. Which road had they taken? The girl bent down to the ground and strove to discover the trace of wheels, but she did not succeed. The road was paved, and the night was still very dark.

"I ought to take one of the roads they did not take," she thought. "But how am I to tell?"

She breathed a prayer to heaven for guidance, and then boldly took the turn to the right, and hurried onward as fast as she was able.

Hour after hour she tramped wearily onward. The rain ceased and the sky cleared. She encountered no one; she heard no sounds of approach. But the long exertion after her month of fasting began to tell upon her. Her feet grew strangely heavy; she could hardly lift them. It seemed to her that to lie down somewhere, even if it were to die, would be a bliss approaching to that of heaven.

Yet she staggered on. The wind swept the rain drops from her water-proof garments. The pure pale face, piteous now and wan and anxious, looked out of the dark-blue hood like a waning star.

"I must rest," she said to herself. "I can go no farther. Ah, what is that? A light? Are they coming?"

She stood still and stared before her.

In the near distance a light was gleaming. It was a faint white light and shone steadily, as from a house-window.

Beatrix summoned courage, and approached it.

As she drew nearer, she saw that the light came from a peasant-farmer's cottage. The thatched roof and casement windows became plainly visible. The yard-gates were wide open, and the girl leaned against their frame-work, and looked in.

She saw a large farm-yard, with ricks of hay and straw, a range of sheds at its farther side, the cottage at its left, and finally in its centre a big farm-wagon, to which was attached a stout Flemish horse. The wagon seemed filled with boxes, loaded with farm-produce, which had been kept over the winter in order to command spring prices.

It was now about four o'clock in the morning. The pale gleams of approaching dawn began to lighten the eastern horizon. The farmer would soon be on his way to market. Beatrix glided into the farm-yard, and stole to the side of the wagon.

The end-board had not been put up. The girl hesitated but a second, and then clambered up into the vehicle. The boxes were full to over-flowing. At the rear end was a loose bundle of straw, which the thrifty farmer had put in for the consumption of his horse while in town. Beatrix crept under this straw and hid herself completely. Then, trembling, and fearful of discovery, she waited.

The moments of her waiting seemed ages. She held her breath in her suspense. Yet within ten minutes the exhaustion of her body had weakened even the anxiety of her mind, and again she slept—this time

as peacefully as a little child upon its mother's bosom.

She was vaguely conscious presently of a jarring motion as of jolting upon an ill-paved road, of the sound of a horse's bell, of a man's rough voice—but these sensations faded away, and she slept long and dreamlessly.

She was awakened by the stopping of the wagon. The sudden cessation of the jolting was as effectual in arousing her as would have been a loud noise through the midst of stillness. She was broad awake in an instant, alert, on her guard, every sense sharpened.

It was well that she had not stirred, for now the farmer's voice, in rude patois, was heard. He was evidently speaking to some one who had overtaken him upon the road. Beatrix understood French thoroughly, but the peasant was speaking in the Flemish, or a corruption of the Flemish tongue, and she could not understand a word he uttered.

As he ceased speaking a voice replied to him—a voice which Beatrix recognized with a thrill of terror—the voice of Randall Brand !

The girl could not understand what her enemy was saying, for he too spoke in Flemish, a smattering of which he had acquired during his stay at the Chateau Valbeck, but the rising inflection of his voice indicated that he was asking a question.

A colloquy between the two followed. The peasant was stolid, dull, ignorant, a mere digger of the soil. Brand flung him a coin, and the man's voluble expression of thanks showed that he was greedy of money. It was well that Beatrix had not followed her first brief impulse and thrown herself on his protection.

Then Randall Brand rode up close to the wagon—he was on horseback—and peered over into the boxes of

produce. It was now broad daylight, about eight o'clock in the morning. He could see that no one was hidden between the boxes. With the handle end of his riding-whip he carelessly stirred the straw in the end of the wagon. Beatrix lay motionless, a horrible paralysis seeming to enchain her, her very breathing suspended.

"The man's honest," she heard Brand mutter. "He has not seen the girl. She took one of the other roads—or she stopped at some peasant's cottage—or she hid herself in the fields or ditches—or I have passed her and she's coming on now. Which is it?"

He deliberated. At length, after the lapse of an eternity, as it seemed to Beatrix, her enemy wheeled his horse and galloped back in the direction whence he had come.

The farmer resumed his journey, his horse proceeding at a walk, its usual pace.

Beatrix did not sleep again. The peasant amused himself by singing, in a loud, coarse voice, a song in his own language, and talked to his horse, and indulged in a soliloquy, and halted once or twice to gossip with a passing wagoner, but he did not once turn his attention to his own wagon.

About the middle of the forenoon the wagon again halted—this time at one of the gates of the fortified city of Antwerp. The halt was brief, the wagon passed in, entering one of the long tree-bordered streets, and Beatrix had not yet been discovered!

A brief further progress brought the farmer into a small, paved square, adorned with a fountain in its center, and surrounded with picturesque old houses which presented their gable ends to the street. Among these houses, with the sign-board swinging in the wind, was a quaint old inn. There was a paved wagon-road

leading through the building at one side to a stable-yard at the back. The farmer made his way to this yard and there came to a final halt.

Then ensued a chattering in Flemish between the wagoner and the stable-boy, and the two walked away together, entering the stable.

Beatrix waited a few minutes and then cautiously removing the smothering straw, peeped over the wagon-box.

The yard was empty. A maid, in a high white cap, was entering the kitchen, the door of which she closed behind her. No one was to be seen in the open stable. Now was the girl's time. She slipped out at the back of the wagon and glided to the open gate, and the next moment had entered the square, her movements unseen and unsuspected by the inn-people.

She dropped her hood from her hat as she walked along, and pulled the latter over her forehead—to screen her face. She had a veil in her traveling-bag, and she tied it on. Her cloak was wrinkled and bits of straw clung to it. She brushed them off as best she could with her hands, and turned into the nearest street.

She was very tired, weak, and hungry. Her first necessity was a good breakfast. She traversed several streets, casting frequent glances backward, but she was not pursued. She discovered no eating-house, but in a very narrow, quiet street, bordered with tall, gabled houses, she came upon a sleepy-looking inn, which appeared very quiet and respectable—the very place in which a young lady without escort might find comfort and shelter.

Beatrix entered the inn-parlor which fronted the street. A woman was in attendance. The young fugitive addressed her in the French language, asking for a room and breakfast.

Had the girl applied at one of the hotels frequented by foreigners, her application might have been rejected with disdain. Young women traveling alone without escort or attendants are regarded by the Continental Boniface, as by his English confrère, with marked suspicion. But this woman contented herself with regarding the girl very sharply, and replied in French:

"We can give you what you require, Mademoiselle ; but, pardon, you are alone?"

"I am alone," said Beatrix, uncovering her face, and speaking with the gentle dignity of the true lady.

The beautiful sad countenance, so childlike in its loveliness, so pure in all its features, and the courteous manner, impressed the woman.

"Come this way, Mademoiselle," she said. "The hotel is at Mademoiselle's disposal."

She conducted the guest to an upper room overlooking the street.

"I should like a fire," said Beatrix ; "and I would like my breakfast in my room."

The woman, a Fleming, large, stolid of countenance, like so many of the lower class of her race, withdrew.

Beatrix sank down in the nearest chair.

The room was large, having three windows and a fireplace. The floor was uncarpeted. A bed stood in an alcove. A door led into an adjoining room, and over this door was a small transom window, with two narrow panes of glass into it.

Beatrix noticed these details before a boy came up with a bucket of coal and other materials for a fire. A ruddy blaze was soon filling the chimney-place, and the pleasant heat began to penetrate the chilliness of the apartment.

The girl removed her cloak and hat and boots, and put up her travel-worn feet upon the fender. Her

breakfast of coffee, rolls, omelet, and hot beefsteak—a special order—were presently brought up to her. On finding herself alone, she ate ravenously. After the breakfast-things had been removed she locked her door securely, and went to bed.

As may be supposed, she slept nearly all day. Late in the afternoon she awakened, and found her fire growing low and her room chill. She arose, took a bath with the resources at her command and dressed herself. Her garments showed no trace of the previous night's exposure to the storm. Then she caused her fire to be replenished and ordered a good dinner.

After the meal had been served, and she was warmed, strengthened and refreshed, she sat down before her ruddy hearth and gravely pondered her situation.

What was she now to do? Where was she to go?

She was an orphan, without relatives other than the Brands. She had been educated at a fashionable school near London during the earlier part of her life. At the age of fourteen she had been transferred to a Paris pensionnat whence she had been withdrawn a year previous to her appearance at the Chateau Valbeck. During the past year she had traveled over the Continent with her relatives, not staying long in any one place. The Brands had artfully contrived that during that period she should not make a single friend.

She could not go to her old schools—the Brands, not finding her elsewhere, would surely seek her there. She knew no one else to whom she could apply.

Stay! There were the trustees of her estate. They lived in London. They would surely protect the person of the heiress whose fortune they guarded. Beatrix remembered vaguely having heard of an orphan who was oppressed by her guardian, and who had gone before some court and successfully petitioned for a new guard-

ian. Could she not do the same? Would not the trustees of her property aid her in so doing?

She believed that they would.

The question was now reduced to the simple matter of reaching those trustees.

They were in London; she was at Antwerp. She could not telegraph or write to them the story of her wrongs. She must see them in person. Without doubt, the Brands had telegraphed to Ostend to have her detained should she seek to embark from that port. They would doubtless intercept her at any of the Holland ports.

She decided to continue her flight to England through France.

It was quite possible, even probable, that the Brands were even now seeking her throughout Antwerp. It would not be safe for her to go boldly to the railway-station at the time of the departure of eastbound-trains. To be overtaken by the Brands before she could obtain the protection of her trustees would involve her destruction. The Brands were her legal protectors; they stood to her in place of her parents; they were of unblemished reputation, and anything they might say of her would be believed in preference to her statements.

"I must get away from Antwerp to-night," she decided. "I will go to Calais by way of Brussels. I think the Brands will not suspect me of so much caution and forethought and will not look for me in a Brussels-bound train."

She had planned her course. Nothing remained but to carry her plan into action.

Her bill must be paid at the hotel, and a carriage ordered to convey her to the station. She locked her door, drew down the shade of the nearest window, and

took out her purse from her bosom, and emptied its contents into her lap.

She had an allowance by her father's will, for her own personal use, quite separate from the sum allowed her guardian for her board and extraneous expenses, and this allowance since her nineteenth birthday had been eight hundred pounds a year. She had half this sum in her purse—four hundred pounds in gold and Bank of England notes.

A year hence, when she should have attained her majority, she would enter into the enjoyment of a yearly income of ten thousand pounds a year. But now this sum in her possession looked to her like vast wealth.

It lay all spread out upon her dress, having the appearance of a much larger sum than it was, and Beatrice was counting it over, preparatory to disposing of it in portions about her person, when a noise startled her.

She raised her eyes and beheld a sight that transfixed her with horror.

Against the transom-window over the door that communicated with the adjoining room, was pressed closely a man's face—a greedy, murderous, unknown visage, with ugly, sinister eyes fixed upon her money!



CHAPTER IV.

TRANSFORMATION.

In a first-class compartment of a mail-train on the South-Eastern railway, two women were seated.

They were on their way to London from Calcutta, having journeyed from India by the overland route.

They were evidently mistress and maid.

The former was Miss Bermyngham, the only child and heiress of the late Miles Bermyngham, the great Calcutta merchant, who had died one year previous to the opening date of our story.

It had been the wish of her father that Miss Bermyngham should return to England upon his decease, but, her health being imperfect, and feeling disinclined to undertake the long, hard journey, she had remained at Calcutta nearly a twelvemonth. Her property had been transferred to England, and she had at last yielded to the urgent letters of friends whom she had not seen for years, and was returning to her native land to spend the remainder of her life.

She was about twenty-three years of age, small, and of insignificant appearance, with a thin, querulous freckled face, with light blue eyes, and with thin flaxen hair, which was drawn plainly away from her

contracted forehead. She looked sickly, fretful, and miserable. She had hurried through from Marseilles without stopping, and appeared to be well-nigh exhausted.

She was dressed in a costume of brown velveteen, and was wrapped in an exquisite Indian cashmere shawl, which was gathered closely about her throat. Her hands were ungloved, and her fingers were loaded with magnificent diamond rings of immense value.

Miss Bermyngham had been educated by competent governesses : had been petted and spoiled all her life : had always been used to luxury and the command of a retinue of servants, and yet, singularly enough, but for her display of wealth in her personal belongings—so insignificant was her personal appearance—one might have taken her for the maid.

And as readily might the maid have been taken by a casual observer as the mistress.

Miss Bermyngham had departed from India with two attendants, an elderly man and this young woman. The man had been her father's confidential clerk and her own trusted friend and adviser. He had been taken ill upon the voyage and had died before the arrival of the vessel at Suez. After his death, her maid had become a tower of strength to the heiress. She trusted her implicitly, and relied upon her as weak-minded people rely upon those with strong resolute wills. The maid was called Agatha Walden. She had been in the service of Miss Bermyngham only a week before the latter had sailed for England, and had been hired especially to attend the young lady during the voyage.

She was about the same age as her mistress, and a blonde also, but a blonde after a singular type. Her complexion was very fair, a combination of milk and

roses, such a complexion as is produced by the enameler's art. Her eyes were jet black ; her hair of a golden-red hue of that peculiar vivid tint which belongs to black hair, after it has been submitted to a bath of golden dyes. She also was brief of stature and small of figure, but she was so delicately formed as to merit the description of fairy-like. She was soft, dainty and caressing, full of pretty, purring ways, and seemed as innocent as a white kitten. Her heavy lids had a trick of drooping themselves over the black eyes in a modest, shy fashion, and one seldom encountered a level glance from pretty Miss Agatha.

The remaining seats in the compartment were littered with articles of travel, a costly dressing-bag with gold and ivory mountings, smelling-bottles, books, traveling-rugs, and a Bradshaw's guide. Miss Bermyngham held a little gold flacon to her nostrils, and inhaled the pungent odors it contained, while she looked fretfully out of the window.

"And this is England?" she said, discontentedly. "It is hideous weather for April. The country looks sodden and damp, and so does the sky. I'm sorry I left India, Agatha. Fifteen years in India have spoiled me for this climate. And I wish I had taken your advice," she added, "and remained in Paris for a week. To arrive at a London hotel in such weather as this and find no one to welcome me is very unpleasant."

"With plenty of money any place can be made delightful," said the maid, in her soft, purring voice. "You will have fires in your rooms, my lady, and a good dinner, and presently your spirits will revive. And you will telegraph to Lady Folliott, who will come to you to-morrow—"

She paused, as Miss Bermyngham's face became suddenly overspread with a pale blue tint even to the

lips, and sprang up, snatching from the open dressing-bag a bottle of medicine, of which she hastened to administer a few drops.

Miss Bermyngham slowly revived, regaining something of her usual complexion.

"I feel better," she said, presently. "Sit down, Agatha. I think these paroxysms of pain grow more severe every time. I thought I was dying just now."

"You frightened me almost out of my senses, my lady," said the maid. "You must see one of the great English physicians before you leave London."

"I intend to, but sometimes I think no physician can help me," said the heiress, wearily. "I have inherited my father's heart-disease. I shall go off just as he did, suddenly and without warning. I was a fool to undertake this wearisome journey. I am not near so well as I was when I left Calcutta. What if I should die soon, Agatha? The very thought of death fills me with horror."

"But you will not die!" said Agatha, soothingly. "You will live many years, my lady, and carry out your aunt's plans for you, and be a queen in society and have a vast estate, and be courted, and worshiped, and admired. You have come to England because your aunt, Lady Folliott, urged you to come, and because your home is naturally with her now that your father no longer lives. You will marry your cousin, Sir Lionel Charlton, and become Lady Charlton—"

A faint smile curved the lips of the heiress. "I wonder if my aunt's scheme will really be fulfilled," she said, "and if my cousin, Lionel, will fall in love with me. I wonder if my looks will equal his expectations. Ah! that pain again. Agatha, if I should die—"

"You will not die!" repeated the maid. "If any-

thing were to happen to you, my lady, what would become of me?"

Miss Bermyngham's gaze rested upon the fair, milk-white face of her attendant, and she said after a little :

"Do you know that you puzzle me strangely, Agatha? You have the manners and speech of an educated lady—and yet you are a servant. You have never told me anything about yourself, except that you were born in England. I fancy there is some mystery in your life—"

"There is no mystery," declared Agatha, hastily. "I am just what I seem, a poor, friendless girl. I went out to India as a nursery governess, and am glad to return in any capacity. That is all."

There was an odd alarm apparent for a moment in the maid's eyes, a tightly-drawn expression about her mouth, that contradicted her words. Miss Bermyngham was not keen-sighted, else she would have seen that her maid had lied to her, and that pretty Agatha's life held some dark and hidden mystery in her past.

The heiress lay back upon the seat, and her servant covered her with shawls.

"I wish I had telegraphed to my aunt from Paris," said Miss Bermyngham, after a brief silence, in a changed voice. "She will not expect me for a week yet, and I feel as if I needed her now. Agatha this pain grows terrible—"

She threw off the shawls and struggled to a sitting position, gasping for breath. Again that livid blue tint overspread her face. Agatha was filled with terror.

"Miss Bermyngham—Miss Nerea?" she exclaimed. "What shall we do? Oh, you are very ill—"

The heiress did not seem to hear her. A long lance of red-hot pain seemed to pierce her heart. It was followed by another, yet another! She tried to speak,

a froth gathered about her shriveled lips, a sudden inarticulate cry broke from her—and she fell backwards in an awful silence.

Agatha sprang to her aid ; she bathed her face with aromatic vinegar ; she called to her to speak ; but all in vain. As suddenly and terribly as the event had happened, there was no mistake about it. Miss Bermyngham was dead !

The conviction slowly forced its way to Agatha's brain. She staggered backward to her seat and stared at the ghastly face opposite her in shivering horror.

And the train steamed on swiftly and the roar of the wheels filled the maid's ears with a roar like that of thunder.

"Dead !" said Agatha, hoarsely. "*Dead!* Oh, no, not dead ! So rich, so young, with a life full of promise stretching out before her—*dead!* If it had been I who had died—but people such as I do not die. They drag out their wretched lives until they grow old. *Dead!* What is to become of me ? What is to become of me ?"

That question absorbed all her thoughts. She stared at the dead face with a terrible fascination, and as she stared, a strange thought grew within her, took shape, and became a purpose.

"Why not ?" she asked herself, in a whisper. "No one will be harmed, and I shall be benefited. Why not ?"

She looked out of the windows with a stealthy, side-long glance. And then she crept toward the stiffening figure of her dead mistress, and took from it the rich India shawl. Then, with averted eyes and a tremulous motion of her entire figure, she drew off the diamond rings from Miss Bermyngham's fingers and thrust them upon her own.

She wore a neat black silk dress. With a shudder, she draped the cashmere shawl around her, and flung over the dead young lady her own quiet Paisley wrap.

And then she began to gather up the articles scattered about, and to pack them into portable shape. It was singular how she kept her gaze averted from the dead woman's face. And when she had finished her task she crept into a farther corner of the compartment and crouched there, her gaze wandering, in spite of herself, to that stiffening figure.

"It is only an exchange of identity, and it can never harm her," she thought. "As for me, I lay aside the assumed name and the disguise of Agatha Walden for the name and place of the rich Miss Bermyngham. The mystery of my life will be safely hidden now. Thanks to her confidences, I shall play my part well. As Miss Bermyngham, I shall be safe."

She did not stir from her corner nor from her crouching position, until the train steamed into the London Bridge Station and the guard unlocked her door.

Then she sprang out, white and trembling, with a face full of innocent appealing, crying shrilly:

"My maid is ill—I think she is dying! What shall I do? Call a doctor! My poor servant! Is she dead?"



CHAPTER V.

THE WAY CLEARED.

The terror and distress of the counterfeit Miss Bermyngham, partly genuine and partly affected, brought the guard to her upon the instant. The station-master and a few curious passengers thronged around.

"She is not dead ! My poor Agatha is not dead !" cried the shrill, childish voice of the pretended heiress. "Can nothing be done for her ? Will no one help her ?"

The guard stepped into the coach and bent over the stiffening figure and peered into the ghastly face of the real Miss Bermyngham.

"I think she is not dead. It's a faint or something," he exclaimed. "Make way there !"

The impostor's eyes filled with an awful terror. Not dead ? She reeled, and would have fallen, but that the station-master put out an arm to support her.

The guard lifted the lady's figure in his arms, strode through the little crowd, and hurried to the waiting-room. Here he deposited his burden upon a bench.

The usurper, faint and tottering, was assisted into the waiting-room by the station-master.

A guard brought in Miss Bermyngham's traveling effects, and placed them beside Agatha. With a little

gasp, the maid touched the heavy dressing-bag. In it were her lady's splendid jewels and well-filled pocket-book.

In a very brief space of time, which seemed an age to the impostor—so full was it of breathless suspense, of shivering agony of expectation—a doctor was brought into the room. He was conducted to the side of the unfortunate lady.

Agatha was tempted to make her escape with the treasure in her hand. If Miss Bermyngham were not dead! If she were to revive and denounce her! A cold sweat burst through the white enamel on the young woman's forehead. She took a single tottering step toward the door.

And just then the doctor's calm, professional voice penetrated to her hearing.

"She is quite dead," he said. "She must have died of heart disease. Who is she?"

"A lady's maid," answered the station-master. "That is her mistress yonder."

With an effort to command herself that was almost superhuman, the false heiress subdued her horrible fears, her deadly sickness at heart, and turned, approaching the doctor.

There remained the traces of a mighty agitation in her face and manner. Her black eyes were dilated. She looked like a frightened child, and her features were full of innocent appealing, and her voice quivered as she asked :

"Is she dead, Doctor? Is she really dead?"

"Yes, madame," answered the doctor, gravely. "She must have been dead an hour."

"And I thought she had only fainted. Oh! I was so frightened. My poor girl! It was so sudden. Yet she was saying only a few minutes before, that she had a

frightful pain at her heart. It has been an awful shock to me."

"What was her name?" asked the doctor.

"Agatha Walden," answered the false Miss Bermyngham, her voice fluttering. "I am Miss Bermyngham, on my way from Calcutta to my friends in England. I engaged poor Agatha to attend me on the voyage as my maid. I expect my aunt, Lady Folliott, to meet me to-morrow at the Langham Hotel. This is a sad cloud to fall upon me at the very moment of my arrival."

"It is indeed!" said the doctor, sympathizingly, duly impressed with Agatha's social position and high connections. "I think I can take charge of your servant's remains and funeral, Miss Bermyngham, if you desire to be relieved of all care and anxiety in the matter. I do not see that you need be troubled at all!"

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" cried Agatha, in her most gushing, cooing voice. "I am afraid of death, Doctor. And I do so long to be with my dear aunt again. The girl was nothing to me, but she was a faithful servant, a good, honest creature, and I should like her to be decently buried—not in a pauper's grave, you know. She had no relatives—no friends. I know nothing whatever about her, except that her name is Agatha Walden. I took her upon written references, and have forgotten the names attached to them. There is no one to notify of her death!"

"And this is all you know about her, Miss Bermyngham?"

"All!" said Agatha. "She has a carpet-sack in the luggage-van. That had better be given to some poor person. She was to serve me upon the voyage without pay, for her passage, you know. Of course I shall pay her funeral expenses!"

She opened the dressing-bag with fluttering hands,

and extracted from it the plump pocket-book of her dead mistress. Out of its abundant contents she bestowed a ten-pound note upon the physician as a fee, and gave him twice that amount to defray the funeral expenses of Miss Bermyngham. She gave the station-master and the guards a sovereign each, and requested one of the latter to call a cab for her.

"There will be a coroner's inquest," observed the doctor, "but that is a mere formality. Most probably you will not be called upon to testify, madame, the death being plainly the result of disease, yet I am obliged to demand your address."

Agatha's face expressed her alarm.

"I hope you won't have to call upon me!" she exclaimed. "I should be so terrified."

The doctor assured her that, in all probability, she would not even be mentioned in the case other than casually.

The girl sought in the dressing-bag for the card-case of her late mistress, and found it. She took a card from it and handed it to the physician. Upon it, in delicate letters was inscribed the name—*Nerea Bermyngham*.

"Write under the name my address at the Langham Hotel," said the usurper. "I shall remain at the Langham a day or two before proceeding to Folliott Court."

The physician inclined his head deeply. The guard returned, announcing that the cab waited. There was no reason why the girl should remain longer at the station, and the official gathered up her effects, after a word to the doctor. Agatha, drew closer around her the sumptuous shawl of her dead mistress.

"Would you like to take a last look at your servant?" asked the medical man

Agatha shivered.

"No, no!" she said, hurriedly. "I could not bear it. I—I have had such a shock—"

There were certainly tears in her eyes; her red lips quivered like a grieved child's.

"Poor little tender heart!" thought the doctor. "It is fortunate that she's an heiress. She could never cope with the rude world."

Yet, in spite of herself, Agatha shot a strange, stealthy, sidelong glance out of her black eyes at the ghastly dead face of Miss Bermyngham. It seemed to her guilty soul that those half-closed eyes regarded her with a look of menace and awful accusing. She could scarcely repress the shriek that arose to her lips. Never, so long as she might live, could the woman who had usurped the place of Nerea Bermyngham forget that picture of her dead and wronged mistress.

Agatha drew down her vail over her face, and followed the guard with a faltering tread.

The dead Nerea Bermyngham lay in the public waiting-room, a subject for a coroner's inquest, forsaken, unhonored, neglected, to be presently interred by strangers in a grave suitable for the poor and unknown servant. This the fate of the petted heiress—the girl who had come to England with the expectation of making a grand marriage and becoming a queen in society!

And the false Nerea Bermyngham, the treacherous maid, with her odd blonde beauty and soft, cooing ways, went out in her stolen garb and stolen honors to enjoy the wealth and position she had so basely usurped!

"I have only served her as she would have served me, if it had been I who died," thought the impostor. "I shall not be troubled about the inquest or the

funeral. Who could ever have forseen this turn in my fortunes? At one swift bound, I exchange poverty, toil, an existence menaced with the pursuit of enemies for a life of ease, splendor and happiness. It is Agatha Walden who lies dead in yonder waiting-room. Suppose they tracked me in Calcutta and discovered my assumption of the name and character of Agatha Walden, lady's maid! Suppose they track me to England? At London Bridge Station their search will end. Agatha Walden lies dead in yonder waiting-room and will be buried to-morrow in a nameless grave."

Her vail hid from the station-men, who regarded her curiously as she passed them, the exultant smile that flickered upon her lips.

She guard assisted her into the cab, and placed the dressing-bag and other articles upon the opposite seat. Agatha had forgotten Miss Bermyngham's dozen trunks, and now ordered these to be sent to the Langham Hotel, bestowing an additional sovereign upon the guard, with the memoranda of her luggage. She was very lavish with Miss Bermyngham's money. Her own carpet-sack was dismissed from her thoughts.

The order was given to the cabman, and the vehicle rolled away.

Agatha leaned back, exultant, her very soul glowing with sinister delight.

Not a doubt obtruded itself upon her as to her ability to enact the character she had assumed. She had known Miss Bermyngham very intimately. She knew that the dead heiress had not seen her English friends for fifteen years. She knew also that Miss Bermyngham, with morbid sense of her insignificant appearance, had not allowed her face to be photographed since her childhood. There was not a portrait of the dead lady in existence.

Agatha was thoroughly conversant with the private history of her dead mistress, who had been fond of talking by the hour of her fine old family, ancient descent, and aristocratic connections. She had no fear of betraying herself at any point by her ignorance of family matters.

And then she had in Miss Bermyngham's trunks packets of letters, diaries, valuable papers of various sorts, all of which would be of indescribable value to her.

These she meant to study without loss of time, before seeing even Lady Folliott.

"I cannot be too guarded," thought the girl. "Have I left behind me any loophole for suspicion to enter? Have I left unguarded any point of my secret? My carpet-sack which I have abandoned as her property—there's nothing in that—nothing whatever, except a few changes of coarse under-garments, which I bought ready-made in Calcutta, and a serge gown. Not a scrap of written paper, not a fragment of diary—only fools keep diaries!—not a thing other than those I have named. So far all is safe. Now, in regard to Miss Bermyngham herself!"

She reflected anxiously, reviewing in her own mind every article of wearing apparel upon the person of her dead mistress.

The result was a redoubled satisfaction and delight.

Miss Bermyngham had boxes of finest linen under-wear, trimmed with rich, real laces and daintiest embroideries, and marked with monogram, but these were packed safely away. For the voyage, the heiress had prepared a special outfit—as is the custom of most Englishwomen—of plainest unmarked, untrimmed linen, which might be worn and then thrown away. There was nothing whatever on her person that might

not have been worn by her maid, now that the latter had stripped from her her shawl and jewels.

"Everything is safe," the usurper assured herself. "Absolutely safe! I will rest to-night. To-morrow I will do a little shopping, study Miss Bermyngham's papers, engage a French maid—and, last of all, telegraph to Lady Folliott of my arrival. I shall follow out the course Miss Bermyngham had marked for herself," and Agatha's eyes glittered. "I shall dress splendidly; I shall enter upon the full enjoyment of the Bermyngham wealth; I shall fawn upon and flatter Lady Folliott and make her pet and adore me; I shall win my way into society and be a queen; and finally," and Agatha's face hardened, and a grim, resolute expression darkened her pretty face, "I shall marry her cousin, Sir Lionel Charlton, and become Lady Charlton of Charlton Place. Ah, I have stepped into a brilliant destiny!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT HAND!

The sight of that evil visage above the transom-window of her door held Beatrix Rohan motionless, as if stricken with paralysis. Her sudden immovability aroused the watcher. His greedy eyes wandered from the display of wealth in her lap to her white and frightened face—to the purple-gray eyes dilating in wild alarm. The face disappeared upon the instant.

Then Beatrix catching up her dress with its contents, ran to the door and tried the latch. The door was fast.

She hurried to her door opening into the hall, and looked out. The dim and narrow passage was empty.

The girl's nerves were considerably shaken. She trembled excessively. She sat down in a corner of the room, out of range of the transom-window, but it was some minutes before she could resume her task.

It seemed to her as if all mankind was banded against her to rob her of the wealth she had inherited from her parents. Her relatives had persecuted her for her money, and the owner of that sinister countenance pressed against her window had looked as if he meant to steal her purse.

It behoved her to be specially guarded and cautious. She had no one to protect her ; she must protect herself.

Regaining her composure, she carefully sewed into her stays all her bank-notes. Her gold coins numbered some thirty sovereigns. These she left in her pocket-book.

She re-arranged her dress and formed her plan of action. She dared not remain at the inn over night, lest the Brands should find her there. She must leave Antwerp immediately. It was nearly dusk. The streets below lay in deep shadow. A light or two gleamed from the windows of the opposite houses.

The girl rung her bell, and ordered her bill and a carriage to convey her to the quay of the London steamer.

"But the steamer does not leave at night, mademoiselle," replied the waiter, in French. "It departs at precisely twelve o'clock, noon, to-morrow."

"That does not matter," declared Beatrix. "I will have the carriage."

A half-hour elapsed before the carriage was announced. By this time it was quite dark. Dozens of lights flickered now upon the street below. The corner-lamps were burning. Beatrix was shrouded in

her long dark-blue water-proof, with hat and gloves on, long before the waiter came up to call her. She sprang up from her dark window as his loud knock resounded on her door, and followed him down to the court-yard where her cab waited.

The landlord helped her into it and gave her order in a loud voice. The vehicle started, proceeded a few paces, and halted, as a man came running out of the inn and climbed the box beside the driver.

The light of the hostler's lantern fell for an instant upon his face as he approached. Beatrix recognized him. His was the visage she had seen at her window!

Before she could utter a word or a cry, the carriage speeded out of the yard into the street.

It proceeded at a rattling pace through the narrow tree-bordered avenues, which seemed quiet and respectable. Beatrix softly opened the door, keeping her hand upon the latch.

Her fears were all alive. Stories that she had heard of robbery and murder thronged into her mind. Yet she had never been more cool and self-possessed, or more resolute, in her life.

"The driver will take me to the quay," she thought. "He looked an honest fellow. The man means to rob me after the driver leaves me. We will see."

Just then the carriage stopped abruptly, coming almost to a halt. Beatrix look out and saw that another carriage just ahead had caused the momentary blockade. There were no lights to her cab. At that point the street was dark. A corner presented itself close at hand.

As quick as a flash, Beatrix slipped out of the vehicle and glided into the shadow of a tall house, which was conveniently near. Her movements had not been witnessed. The cab rattled away upon its course.

The girl turned the nearest corner, and ran swiftly.

She had not proceeded a dozen rods when she beheld a cab approaching at a walk. She ascertained that it was empty, and signalled it. The driver drew up at the curb, signifying his readiness for an engagement, and Beatrix, an instant later, was on her way to the railway station.

She arrived almost at the moment of the departure of an express train for Brussels. She had barely time to pay her cabman, to procure her ticket, and hurry to her place in a first-class compartment, assisted by the guard, when the train steamed out of the station.

And now for the first time since leaving the inn she breathed freely.

The compartment into which she had been ushered had already an occupant at the moment of her entrance.

This occupant was an elderly English lady, very short, very stout, and very apoplectic in appearance. She was dressed in the worst possible taste—as so many English women delight in dressing upon their travels—wearing a light-colored silk gown, all frayed and worn about the hem, that had originally served as a dinner-dress. Over this was a jacket of long grayish fur.

Beatrix, possessing the true English exclusiveness, and having in addition a pressing sense of the necessity of extreme caution, moved to a farther window and looked out into the darkness.

Her countrywoman was equally silent. She studied the girl's appearance critically in a quiet manner, but when Beatrix moved she averted her gaze, contemplating the lamp overhead with an appearance of great interest.

The most casual observer could not have taken Beatrix for anything other than she was, a high-bred,

delicately reared, aristocratic young lady. Her traveling companion studied her rare and exquisite beauty, the low, wide forehead, the long curling lashes on the pure, pale cheeks, the masses of tawny hair, the refinement, the daintiness, the grace, all with appreciative eyes. She noted, too, that the girl's water-proof cloak was of excellent material and well-cut, that her traveling-bag was of real Russia leather, and that all the details of her toilet were perfect in their way.

"She must be rich," thought the old woman. "How odd that she should be traveling alone!"

She was so interested in her study of the girl that her traveling-rug slipped from her unheeded. Hearing the sound of its falling, Beatrix turned and picked it up, restoring it courteously to its corpulent and elderly owner.

"Thanks," said the old lady, in a well-bred voice. "I am very careless, to be sure. I am not used to traveling alone. Are you alone also?"

Beatrix stole a swift glance into her country-woman's red, apoplectic countenance. It was a kindly old face, and despite her slovenly attire, the old lady was evidently really a lady, well-bred, educated and refined. Beatrix felt an instinctive liking for her.

"Yes, madame," she answered, politely. "I am on my way to England, where I have friends, but I am traveling alone."

"You are too young to be wandering about in this manner alone," said the old lady, kindly, but with something of surprise in her eyes. "Even I, who am fifty-seven years of age, do not like to travel unprotected. My maid is a Belgian and would not leave Antwerp, so I am traveling to England alone, by way of Brussels and Calais. But I assure you, this caring for one's own luggage, and buying one's own tickets, and hiring one's

own cabs, are all a nuisance. How could your friends permit you to have so much annoyance—you, who are so young and—and so attractive?"

"My friends are in England," said Beatrix. "I have no friends in this country."

The old lady drew her own conclusions from the girl's reticent manner, that Beatrix was a governess out of place, an ex-teacher in some English school, or an English girl who had been at school at Antwerp.

"Girls are brought up differently now-a-days from what they were when I was young," she thought. "What with women's rights' women, and women doctors, and women lecturers, and all these new-fangled notions, women are expected to be mannish, and there's not the care taken of young girls that there used to be. They must push and strive and fight their own way just as men do. It's a bad change. Women are not made to be men nor to act the part of men. They are weak and should be cared for and watched over and sheltered."

And this conservative old lady sighed over the degeneration of these later days.

Presently, being of a social temperament, and having taken a fancy to Beatrix, she asked the latter by what route she intended to travel to England. Finding that the girl was going by way of Calais, she expatiated upon the horrors of sea-sickness, and the advantages of the short sea-route, and grew quite entertaining. But her share of the national quality of exclusiveness was large, and she did not propose to take the girl under her convoy.

"I shall stop at the Hotel de Flandre at Brussels to-night and go on in the morning," she said. "I prefer to travel by daylight. There are so many horrid accidents to the railway trains now-a-days, and if I am to be

killed on the railway I prefer to be killed in the daytime, so that at least I can have the melancholy satisfaction of seeing by what means I die."

But no accident occurred upon this occasion, as the old lady evidently expected. The train arrived at Brussels safely, and the guard unlocked the doors.

Beatrix's traveling-bag was attached to her belt, and she had no other luggage; but her countrywoman possessed a vast quantity of impedimenta, and the girl paused to assist her in loading down her person with rug, shawl, bag, box, and parcel. She would have offered to carry some of these, but the old lady had put aside her sociability and was once more the reserved and slightly supercilious Briton, with the air of being fully sufficient unto herself.

Beatrix waited until the guard had helped out the old lady with her effects, and then, with a parting salutation, made her way to a cab.

She had made up her mind to go to the Hotel de Flandre also, feeling a sort of security in the proximity of her countrywoman, and had just given the address to the cabman, and was about to enter the vehicle, when a loud and shrill outcry behind her aroused her attention, and she halted, looking around.

She beheld the old lady the center of an excited little group, herself the most excited of them all. She was gesticulating frantically, and talking hysterically in an odd mixture of French and English.

"What can be the matter?" Beatrix said, aloud.

It was easy to see that her countrywoman was in trouble. Beatrix stepped forward and asked what had happened.

"I have had my pocket picked!" exclaimed the old lady. "It was a fellow in a black coat. I saw him—he has escaped! And these men stand gaping here

instead of pursuing him. He picked my pocket of my purse, and I haven't a penny of money, and my daughter lying ill in England, waiting for me to come to her! Oh, if they would only pursue the rascal that I might see him hanged!"

The poor old woman gave way to a wild burst of tears, half of misery, half of downright anger.

"Madame shall inform the police," said a polite Belgian. "In a few days, the purse may perhaps be found—"

"In a few days! 'Perhaps!'" cried the old Englishwoman, growing apoplectic. "*Mong Doo!* And my daughter ill! I cannot stop a day. What a vile country! I shall complain to my government. We shall see if Englishwomen are to be robbed with impunity in a little no-account country like this. 'A few days!' I cannot wait. What am I to do?"

Her watery gaze rested upon Beatrix in a sort of supplication.

"Let me advise you, madam," said the girl, gently. "You can lodge a complaint with the police to-night. And if you will permit me I will defray your expenses to England very gladly in return for your kind protection."

This offer was made in English, in a low tone. The old woman regarded Beatrix as her deliverer and preserver. She accepted the offer eagerly and gratefully.

A police officer, on duty at the station, was already at hand. The old lady told her story, described the thief, and gave her English address, uttering dire threatenings in the name of the British government in case her property were not recovered.

Then she suffered Beatrix to lead her to the cab, and they drove away in the direction of the Place Royale.

The old lady gave vent to her indignation against the

pickpocket who had robbed her, the city of Brussels, the country, its government and institutions generally, in good set terms, and had grown somewhat calm before they reached their destination.

"You are very good, my dear," she said, as the cab approached the Place Royale, "and I am very grateful. To stop here until I could receive a remittance from England would be martyrdom. I will repay your kind loan as soon as I reach my friends. My name is Trevor—Mrs. Trevor. And yours?"

"Please register our names as Mrs. Trevor and companion, madame," said the girl, flushing. "My name is Beatrix——"

She paused, as the carriage came to a halt.

"An odd name!" said Mrs. Trevor, who had caught the sound imperfectly. "Miss Trist! Very odd. French, isn't it? Ah, we get out here. Please get out first, Miss Trist. My knees are so weak, I fear I shall not be able to stand up."

Beatrix alighted, and a hotel-clerk assisted Mrs. Trevor to descend. The traveling companions were escorted up-stairs to a parlor, with a bedroom adjoining, all fronting the Place. Another bedroom across the hall, opening upon a court, was accepted by Beatrix.

The girl ordered a supper to be served in their apartment, much to Mrs. Trevor's satisfaction. A clerk brought up the hotel-register, and the elder lady signed it as Beatrix had indicated.

"I will go to my room now, and wash off a little of this dust of travel, and lay aside my hat and cloak," said the girl cheerfully. "I shall lodge just across the hall, within sound of your voice, should you need to call me in the night."

She withdrew. She crossed the narrow corridor and applied the key to the lock. Just then the sound of a

step that was strangely familiar made her heart quicken its beatings. Looking up, she beheld, standing in the wide, well-lighted staircase hall, only a few feet distant, her worse enemy—the man from whom she was fleeing—Randall Brand!

CHAPTER VII.

A BREATHING SPACE.

Yes, it was Randall Brand, in that upper stair-hall at the Hotel de Flandre—Randall Brand, haggard and sinister, his yellow complexion yellower than ever, his red hair showing in a heavy fringe beneath his tall, shiny black hat, his serpent eyes gleaming with restless fires, his hanging underlip swollen and quivering, his two long front teeth protruding like a wolf's fangs.

He was talking in a low voice with a black-garbed waiter who held a tray in his hands.

Only the low murmur of their voices reached the girl's ears.

Her enemy had not seen Beatrix, thanks to her noiseless movements, the dark color of her cloak, and the deep shadow of the ill-lighted passage in which she stood. But as he turned his head in her direction, as if some subtle instinct warned him that his quarry was near, the girl pushed open her door swiftly, and disappeared within her room.

Then she strained her hearing to listen. She heard Randall Brand's steps approach the corridor and halt before her chamber. She held her breath in suspense. Had he recognized her? Her knees shook. She leaned against the wall, white and despairing.

A knock broke the stillness—a peremptory knock upon the door of her new friend. And then Beatrix heard her enemy enter Mrs. Trevor's room.

The impulse of flight was strong within the girl at that moment ; but her strength seemed utterly gone. She sat down in a chair close by the door, incapable of thought, her brain in a whirl. The minutes seemed like ages to her. But at last she heard the opposite door again open, and Randall Brand's steps in retreat.

What had happened ? Of course he had discovered her presence here. Mrs. Trevor must have answered all his questions.

“Perhaps he expects me to try to escape from the hotel,” she thought. “Perhaps he is waiting for me below, so as to take me prisoner with as little trouble as possible ? Perhaps he has gone for an officer to arrest me as a runaway ward ?”

She waited, sick at heart. She heard a servant in the corridor with glasses and silver jingling upon a tray. He entered her sitting-room. She heard Mrs. Trevor's voice in conversation ; she listened while the table was being laid for the supper ; and she did not stir until the waiter rapped upon her door and announced that supper was served.

Then she rose slowly, heavily.

“Escape is impossible !” she thought. “I cannot leave the hotel. I will appeal to Mrs. Trevor before I am carried away. At least, she will convey a message to my friends in London.”

She removed her hat, but made no change in her toilet. She had forgotten all about the dust of travel. She listened again, then opened her door and slipped across the passage into the sitting-room.

Randall Brand was no longer in the stair-hall, as a

glance assured her. His absence, however, gave her no hope.

She found the supper served. Mrs. Trevor was waiting for her. The stout, red-faced old lady was in a high ill-humor, and looked more apoplectic than ever. She presented an odd resemblance to a gorgeous parrot whose feathers are ruffled. All the superciliousness of her nature, all the pride and anger of which she was capable were in a high state of effervescence.

"Lock the door, my dear," she said, as Beatrix entered. "From the moment I entered Brussels I seem to have become a mark and target for thieves. It is very strange. There's been another of 'em here, Miss Trist. He may say what he likes, but I know he is in league with that pickpocket at the station, although he looks and talks like a gentleman."

Beatrix looked her surprise.

"You look pale and scared, my dear," continued Mrs. Trevor. "You need not be afraid so long as you are under my protection. I am not used to traveling alone, but I know the tricks and ways of these gentlemen who live by their wits. I haven't read the English newspapers so long for nothing. My motto—and it should be the motto of every unprotected woman—is to regard every man you meet, whatever his appearance, as an escaped convict, unless he presents proper credentials, or is introduced to you by a friend."

"And—and you treated your visitor in that way?"

"Certainly, I did," declared Mrs. Trevor, swelling pompously. "A man came in here—a man with red hair and an underlip like a bulldog's—and, at first, I took him for some one from the police office, sent to restore my stolen pocket-book. I asked him for my money, in French, you know. He answered in English that he didn't know anything about my money. I asked

him if he was not in the service of the police? He grew as red as a turkey-cock, and answered that he was a gentleman—an English gentleman. I said I shouldn't have known it if he hadn't told me. You see I took a dislike to him on the spot. And then he flared up—he'd an awful temper. I should hate to have that man my enemy. I think, for an educated man, an Englishman, he's as near a savage and a blood-thirsty tiger as a man can be!" said Mrs. Trevor, rather incoherently. "And I think he's in league with that pickpocket at the station, despite his pretensions to gentility."

"But what did he want?" asked Beatrix, faintly.

"What he wanted, the Lord in heaven only knows!" said Mrs. Trevor, piously. "What he pretended to want was a young girl, his cousin, who he said had run away from home. I should think any young girl would run away rather than sit at table three times a day opposite that under-lip! He asked about my companion. Thought you might be his cousin. I dare say some thief has seen us traveling without escort, and thinking we have money, and having got mine, would like now to relieve you of yours. He asked your name and age, and how you looked—the impudent creature."

"And what did you tell him?"

"Heaven forgive the lies I told him," said Mrs. Trevor, soberly. "You see strong creatures like men, who can fight if attacked, ought to be bold and all that. But a woman can't fight. She's helpless and weak—a kind of pigeon to be picked by the hawks. And, as a woman can't fight for herself, I don't think that Heaven will be hard upon her for a lie or two in the way of self-protection. I am not courageous, I own. I think that this fellow would dog us to England if he thought we had plenty of money. So I told him that you were my companion, that your name was Mrs.

Trist, and that you were a widow. And I told him that you were poor. And I said that my pocket-book had been stolen, and I fixed my eyes on him and asked him if he couldn't tell me something about it. He got mad and left in high dudgeon. Did you hear my door slam?"

"Do you think that he believed what you said?" asked Beatrix, anxiously.

"Believed it! I should like to see who would disbelieve my statements!" cried the old lady, bristling. "And after all, didn't I tell the truth on all points save one? Is not your name Trist? Are you not poor? As to your being a widow, that little fiction might be overlooked. You are my companion during the journey to England, are you not? We are rid of the wretch anyhow, that's one comfort; and, as to what I told him, I am as truthful as anyone, and I hate anything false; but a little deceit might be pardoned a woman, I think, when that deceit is an armor to protect her from the wicked."

Beatrix did not give her opinion. She had a very nice sense of honor, was truthful to an absolute degree, was incapable of a falsehood, yet she could not rebuke this angry old woman whose subterfuge had served her so well.

"And now," said Mrs. Trevor, recovering her cheerfulness, "let us have our supper. I ought to have a good appetite after outwitting that fellow!"

They sat down at the table, and gradually Beatrix acquired a sense of security, and became cheerful also. They lingered over the meal, chatting busily, but the girl carefully avoided all allusions to herself. Mrs. Trevor being very social and talkative, did not notice this reticence.

About ten o'clock they separated, Beatrix going to her own room.

She went to bed and slept soundly. She was awakened in the morning by a servant who knocked upon her door. She arose and dressed, and went to her sitting-room. Mrs. Trevor was waiting for her, and breakfast was on the table.

"We are to start in half-an-hour, my dear," said the old lady. "I ordered the cab, and, as you see, I took the liberty to order breakfast. We have barely time in which to eat it."

The breakfast was after the English type, hearty and substantial, and the travelers did justice to it.

After the meal they hastened to put on their outer garments and descended to the cab. Their journey to the railway station was performed in safety, and they entered the waiting-room assigned to the especial use of first-class passengers.

Ten minutes later they were seated in the railway-coach, in a ladies' first-class compartment, which Beatrix, by a gratuity to the guard, had secured to themselves, and the train was on its way to Calais.

They had seen nothing of Randall Brand at the station, yet Beatrix could not feel quite sure that she had eluded his vigilance. She dreaded at every station to behold his malignant face, and every time the guard appeared she expected him to exhibit a telegram ordering her detention at the next stopping-place.

But her expectations were not verified. She alighted with the other passengers for refreshments, and no one took particular notice of her. She performed the journey in safety, and reached Calais unharmed.

And now a fresh dismay seized her.

"Shall I need a passport, Mrs. Trevor?" she asked. "I have heard that they are very particular here since

the war, and demand passports of every one leaving or entering the country. Why did I not remember this before?"

"They won't take you for an escaping communist, my dear," replied Mrs. Trevor. "I don't think you'll need a passport, but if you do I think I can arrange matters, if you don't mind passing as my servant. You see my passport is for myself and maid, but my maid refused to come with me, and if you choose you can take her place. There's no description of her."

So the matter was settled.

The ladies made their way upon the boat safely, and still there was no sign of Randall Brand. They took seats upon the deck, and Beatrix kept her face veiled.

The passage to Dover was made in the usual ninety minutes. The train was in readiness to depart, upon the English side, and Beatrix and Mrs. Trevor hastened to take their places in it.

"Are your friends living in London, Miss Trist?" inquired the old lady, as they hurried through the fair Kentish weald. "We shall arrive late. Do they expect you?"

"No, madame," answered Beatrix, "they do not expect me, I shall not venture to go directly to them this evening. I must go to a hotel."

"You will very likely be turned away from a hotel, if you arrive alone," said Mrs. Trevor. "And eight o'clock, or thereabouts is late for a young lady to be out unattended. I have to go to my daughter who is ill at Brompton, else I would interest myself in the matter of your lodgings. To what hotel do you intend going?"

"I don't know," answered the girl, despondently. "I've been looking in Bradshaw—"

"Oh, that will never do!" interrupted Mrs. Trevor.

"With that face of yours, my dear, you can't stop at any hotel you may choose at haphazard. Just think of our adventure at the first-class Hotel de Flandre. What might happen here at a second-rate inn? No, no. You have done me a good turn, Miss Trist, and I will do what I can for you. I used to keep house out at Brompton when my husband was living and I had a better income and I had a good old housekeeper—her name was Punnet. When I broke up housekeeping she hired a house and took lodgers. She has a nice respectable house, and she is a good, honest soul, is Mrs. Punnet. I'll give you a line to her and she'll find you a lodging even if her house is full."

Beatrix expressed her gratitude in warm terms.

"I shrink from going to a hotel," she said. "I am very grateful to you, Mrs. Trevor, for your kind interest in me. Where is Mrs. Punnet's house?"

"In Bayswater, number four Wellesley Terrace, Grand street. It is a most respectable neighborhood, and Mrs. Punnet never takes a lodger without references. I'll just write a note to her."

Mrs. Trevor produced writing-paper and a pencil from her hand-bag, and proceeded to write a letter at some length to her former housekeeper. When it was finished, she gave it into the girl's hands unsealed.

"Give that letter to Mrs. Punnet," she remarked, "and she will do anything for you. I may not see you again, Miss Trist, but I will send a servant to you in the morning with the sum of money you have so kindly loaned me. I shall not forget your goodness to an utter stranger, and if I can ever serve you in any way do not hesitate to apply to me. There is my address."

She wrote it down on a scrap of paper which Beatrix put in her pocket-book.

The train arrived at the London Bridge station on

time. Mrs. Trevor took leave of her traveling-companion with a genuine kindness and regret, and took a cab for Brompton. And Beatrix, after a keen glance to make sure that no enemy was lurking near, entered a cab also, and gave the address of Punnet—"4 Wellesley Terrace, Grand street, Bayswater."

CHAPTER VIII.

SETTLING INTO HER WORK.

The real Miss Bermyngham had telegraphed from Paris to the Langham Hotel, London, for a suite of rooms for herself and servant. When the false Miss Bermyngham, therefore, arrived, she was shown up at once to a handsome private parlor, off which two bedrooms opened. She threw back her vail and looked about her half-discontentedly, as if she considered these very inferior quarters indeed, and not worthy her distinguished occupancy.

"Have a fire lighted in the grate immediately!" she commanded, with an air of hauteur that contrasted strangely with her childish appearance and pink-and-white prettiness. "This is a horrible climate after India. And, oh, send a chambermaid to me. I have lost my own maid, and shall need personal attendance until I can procure another."

These orders were promptly executed.

It was early evening, and a drizzling, chilling April rain had set in. A fire was made in the grate. All the gas-jets were lighted. The curtains were lowered. A chambermaid had assisted at the impostor's toilet, had

drawn a low couch near the hearth and had stolen out. The false Miss Bermyngham reclined at full length, basking in the red warm glow, and awaiting the appearance of the dinner she had ordered.

"This is better than the fate I have so narrowly escaped," she thought, contentedly. "If I had not had my presence of mind—if I had foolishly blurted out the truth that my mistress was dead—if I had told those people at the station that I was only the maid—I might have been lodged somewhere up under the eaves at this moment; if they would have taken me in here at all. Or, more likely, as I hadn't a penny of my own, I should be wandering in the wet streets, without food or shelter. There is an old adage that a cat always falls upon her feet. I have verified it."

She laughed softly, showing her narrow, whited, pointed teeth.

Her dinner was brought up to her presently and was served with ceremony. The false Miss Bermyngham was not one to abate one jot or tittle of the state which she conceived to belong to the position she had usurped. After an hour at the table, she dismissed her servitors with their equipage and returned to her couch.

She had traveled long and without stopping, but she was not especially tired. She mused a while upon her prospective grandeurs, wondered whether she would like Lady Folliott, Miss Bermyngham's aunt, and indulged in some speculations concerning Sir Lionel Charlton. And then her thoughts drifted, in spite of herself, to the dead girl whose name and fortune she had stolen. She shuddered as she recalled the ghastly dead face, with its staring eyes, which had seemed to regard her with a fixed, accusing gaze. The real Miss Bermyngham, the subject of a coroner's inquest, her identity hidden under the name and obscure past of the

mysterious Agatha Walden, would be safely buried on the morrow in an unmarked and humble grave; and yet it seemed to the usurper that her dead mistress was present in the room with her in intangible shape. She turned her head uneasily, with growing nervousness.

"I am positively childish!" she said to herself, angrily. "This will never do. I must occupy my mind with something, or I shall go mad with my imbecile fancies."

Miss Bermyngham's trunks had been brought up and placed in one of the adjoining bedrooms. The keys were in the dressing-bag. Agatha had never seen the contents of these boxes, with one exception, most of them having been in the hold of the vessel during the voyage.

She now devoted herself to their examination.

One trunk was filled with pictures, books, and business documents, over which the impostor glanced hurriedly. A second was filled with under-linen. She laid out a set for her own wear. The contents of several of the boxes seemed to her of little account, being family relics. Two of them only interested her specially.

One was filled with mourning-dresses.

"Humph," said the impostor, turning over the crape-trimmed garments somewhat roughly, "I don't see a colored gown here. That brown velveteen traveling-suit she bought at Marseilles, and it seems to be the only costume she had out of black. It's a year since Mr. Bermyngham died—and mourning isn't becoming to me. I shall go shopping to-morrow."

The last box contained India shawls, Miss Bermyngham's diary, packets of letters, and a camphor-wood case containing a magnificent cashmere shawl, with a card pinned upon it bearing the inscription: "To my

dear aunt, Lady Folliott, from her affectionate niece, Nerea Bermyngham."

"A present, eh?" said the impostor. "Well, I shall deliver it all the same. It must have cost a fortune. And they say one can buy India shawls to better advantage in London than in India. I hope my dear aunt will be pleased with it. And now for the letters and diary."

She took these into the parlor and studied the latter first. It contained an account of Miss Bermyngham's life at Calcutta, expressions of deep grief at the death of her father and of a conviction that she had inherited his malady and would die young. It contained also allusions to her aunt, Lady Folliott, and once or twice the name of Sir Lionel Charlton was mentioned. There were few salient points in it, but after its perusal the usurper felt that she had acquired a keener insight into the Bermyngham family matters and that she need not doubt her ability to play successfully the part she had assumed.

Then followed the reading of the letters.

These were mostly in the handwriting of Lady Folliott and had all been written during the past few months. The impostor gave them close study.

They were couched in the most affectionate terms. In one, bearing date six months previous, occurred this passage :

"I think, dear Nerea, that the greatest desire of my life would be gratified if I could see you the wife of my late husband's nephew, Sir Lionel Charlton. The baronet is young, handsome and noble. Unfortunately, however, his great ancestral estates are encumbered with heavy mortgages, owing to the prodigality and recklessness of his predecessors. As you know, I have

in my own right a very large fortune. My dear husband left me all his property absolutely. It has long been my wish to bestow all I possess, at my death, upon you and Sir Lionel jointly. This I will agree to do if you marry each other. If either of you decline to enter into this marriage, it will be at the expense of my property. But I do not fear that either of you will decline. Sir Lionel is a grand young fellow, and you, my dear Nerea, I am sure must be very lovely. I regret that you refuse to send us your picture. No doubt you mean to surprise us all with your blonde beauty, *ma petite*. Sir Lionel is 'heart-whole.' He has odd ideas about matrimony—means to marry for love. Come and conquer him, my love, and gladden your affectionate aunt."

The false Miss Bermyngham leaned back in her easy-chair and meditated.

"Why shouldn't I marry this handsome young baronet?" she asked herself. "Why should I not become Lady Charlton and the inheritor of this old woman's great double-fortune. That, added to the Bermyngham property, will make me richer than an Indian Begum. I shall be worshipped, toasted, sung about. New bonnets will be named after me. Music will be dedicated to me. I shall be a queen in society. Yes, my resolution is taken. I will marry Sir Lionel Charlton."

She set her thin red lips together in a firm, hard, unpleasant line, and her eyes shone like cat's eyes, with a subtle, yellow gleaming.

She lingered over her study until long past midnight. The tired chambermaid had long since gone to bed, and the false heiress was forced to disrobe herself. That night toilet was full of delight to her.

She employed Miss Bermyngham's carved ivory-

backed brushes to smooth out her rich-hued yellow hair, and tried on Miss Bermyngham's diamonds, admiring their effect, and finally enrobed her small, childish figure in a dainty, lace-trimmed linen gown, and crept into bed, leaving all her lights burning.

Strangely enough, she dropped asleep almost immediately, slumbering as tranquilly as a healthy child.

In the morning she dressed herself in her black silk traveling-dress, and, after her breakfast, went out in a carriage, and unattended, upon a shopping excursion.

Her first visit was to one of those women of doubtful position, known as enamelers. There were certain defects of the usurper's pink and white complexion, certain little lines and cracks which demanded prompt attention. A couple of hours under the hands of the face ensembler resulted in a dazzlingly brilliant complexion, which had the appearance of being genuine. Not only had the skin been made to appear as soft and pure as an infant's, but the lips were of a more vivid red, the eyebrows had a golden tinge that contrasted charmingly with the black eyes under them, and the hair, having received a bath of aqua aura or some similar golden dye, was beautifully Titianesque in its rich coloring.

The imposter purchased a quantity of dyes, perfumes, and other articles necessary to the maintenance of her present personal appearance, and then proceeded to an outfitting establishment, where she bought a trousseau fit for a princess.

She then returned to her hotel.

It was now late in the afternoon, and she ordered her dinner to be served at once. After dinner she despatched a telegram to Lady Folliott, of Folliott Court, near Spalding, Lincolnshire, announcing her arrival as that of Nerea Bermyngham, from Calcutta,

and stating that she would leave London on her way to Lincolnshire upon the morning of the second day subsequent to the sending of her telegram.

"That will keep her at home, I think," said the impostor to herself. "I shall have to-morrow to myself, and to-morrow evening also. By the time I reach Folliott Court I shall have become accustomed to my new honors."

The next day she devoted to the acquisition of a French lady's maid. She studied the advertisements in the newspapers and visited intelligence offices, but it was late in the afternoon before she had suited herself. When she had done so at last, she returned to the hotel. An hour later, her servant, a discreet, reserved-looking Frenchwoman, appeared and entered her service. The impostor made a handsome toilette, wearing a trained dress of black silk, with lilac trimmings, which became her dazzling complexion, and a set of blazing rubies. She made a sweeping entrance into her parlor, which was bright with fire and lights.

"I do far greater justice to the Bermyngham jewels and the Bermyngham wealth than that faded, insignificant Nerea ever could have done!" she said to herself, delightedly. I shall captivate them all in Lincolnshire. I shall have things my own way. I am impatient to see my dear aunt, and to try my fascinations upon her. I dread meeting her, but she is the only one I have need to fear. Suppose—suppose some instinct tells her that I am not of her blood—that I am an impostor! I begin to tremble.

She paused before a long mirror, surveying her reflection, half in admiration, half in anxious criticism.

The door suddenly opened and a servant ushered in an elderly lady in traveling costume, announcing:

"Lady Folliott from Lincolnshire!"



CHAPTER IX.

LADY FOLLIOTT.

As the false Miss Bermyngham had acknowledged to herself, she dreaded a meeting with Lady Folliott, the aunt of the real Miss Bermyngham, as the crucial test of her pretensions.

Lady Folliott might be a shrewd, keen-eyed woman of the world, who would detect the imposture at a glance.

There might have been some especial feature of the true Nerea Bermyngham—some family trait that had early developed itself in her—which the aunt might look for, and failing to discover it, she might have her suspicions aroused to the truth.

And then, too, the impostor had desired to get settled into her new character, to become used to her stolen position, her life of ease, her costly attire, her jewels, before making the acquaintance of Lady Folliott. Even the twenty-four hours additional, which she believed she had secured to herself, seemed of inestimable value to her.

It may be imagined, therefore, that the abrupt announcement of Lady Folliott's arrival at the Langham Hotel—the entrance of the baroness into her very presence—struck dismay to her soul.

She was staring into the long mirror, and admiring her costly toilet and renovated and improved beauty, as we have described, when Lady Folliott was ushered into her room.

As the words of the hotel-clerk struck upon her startled sense of hearing, she wheeled about and faced the intruder, with a sudden sickening sense of terror.

The moment of her trial had come. Upon the reception accorded her by Lady Folliott depended her whole future life. Should the baroness accept her without suspicion as the true Nerea Bermyngham, a life of wealth, luxury, splendor, would be assured to the impostor. She would have all the good things of this life in profusion; she could make a grand marriage; she would be fêted, honored, courted.

But should the baroness discover her imposture, what would be her fate? Poverty, toil and hardships—perhaps a prison! Her past life would be raked up—and there was hidden in her past a dark and fearful mystery which she would rather die than have uncovered!

Her fate then depended upon Lady Folliott. In her great excitement and suspense, her heart seemed to stand still in her bosom. Despite the daring part she was playing, she was essentially a coward. Had it not been for the enameling upon her face, her complexion would have shown white as death.

As it was, the pretty milk-and-roses coloring did not alter, of course, but the girl's black eyes dilated, and her innocent-looking face seemed to express a dozen emotions all at once. She stood as if transfixed. But, regaining her presence of mind almost upon the instant, she gave utterance to a little shriek, and sprang forward crying out:

“My dear aunt! My dear, dear Aunt Folliott!”

The baroness met her half-way and clasped her in a close embrace.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, showering kisses upon the fair false face of the impostor. "My precious little niece! I am so glad to see you, darling. Welcome home to England!"

Her tears fell upon the usurper's cheeks. The false Miss Bermyngham hastened to brush them away with her cobweb hankerchief before any damage could be done to her complexion.

The baroness gently put the girl from her at arm's length, keeping a close grasp upon her, and studied her face with devouring eyes.

How innocent and sweet and loving that face seemed. So dazzling in its pink and white prettiness so apparently artless, so childishly appealing in its expression, with its hard black eyes softened and shaded by the long eyelashes, with the rich yellow hair crepèd and disheveled in fashionable style! The girl seemed utterly guileless. Her looks and manner were cloyingly sweet. She was like a soft purring white kitten, gentle, caressing, and clinging.

Without a word, Lady Folliott drew the girl to her heart again; and again the two embraced.

Presently the impostor drew the baroness to a seat upon the sofa before the fire and took a place beside her, fondling Lady Folliott's gloved hands in her own jeweled fingers.

"This is such a surprise—such a delightful surprise!" exclaimed the false Miss Bermyngham, in a pretended impulsiveness, a gushing sort of way that was certainly very pretty and charming. "But why did you come to London to meet me? I should have gone on to Folliott Court to-morrow. I meant to spare you all trouble—"

"As if coming to meet you were a trouble!" cried

the baroness. "My dear child, you should have telegraphed me from Paris, that I might have been here in waiting to receive you. Did you think I would allow you to come to the very doors of my house as a stranger might have done to receive a formal greeting at my threshold? You are the child of my only sister. You are the nearest relative I have in the world. You have come to be the darling of my old age, I hope, Nerea. I know that I shall love you."

"And I love you already, dear Aunt Folliott!" cried the girl. "But let me remove your bonnet. I want to see if you have changed any since I last saw you."

With her own hands, the impostor removed Lady Folliott's bonnet and scarf. Her black eyes took in a keen survey of her visitor.

The baroness was about fifty years of age, tall and stately, with a remarkably noble presence. Her eyes were blue and keen, her forehead massive, her complexion still fair and unwrinkled. Her thick hair was gray, and was drawn away from her brows in heavy waves. There was an air of command about her that impressed the usurper. She was habitually haughty, it would seem, but there were vast possibilities of tenderness beneath that cold and calm exterior, as the girl had already discovered.

"Well, do you find me changed, Nerea?" asked the lady, with a smile. "I hardly expected you to remember me."

"How could I forget you, dear Aunt Folliott?" cried the impostor, reproachfully. "Those weeks I passed at Folliott Court were among the brightest of my life. I was eight years old at the time, you know. You have scarcely changed, only you look somewhat older. Your hair was not gray, then," ventured the girl.

"No, it was not," said the baroness, with a sigh.

"And so you remember me, Nerea? I have not changed, perhaps, but you have changed greatly. You are small, as I expected to find you. In fact, you are a perfect little fairy! And you have the blonde looks of your mother's family, but you have the Bermyngham black eyes. It is odd, but I have always had the impression that you had inherited your mother's blue eyes."

"An odd impression," laughed the impostor. "You saw so little of me, Aunt Folliott, even in my childhood, that I wonder you remember even the color of my skin. You know that I was always in the nursery during my fortnight at Folliott Court, except when I was brought in after dinner at the dessert, and that you were absorbed with gay company. And yet," added the girl, "I fancy I have heard that my eyes were lighter in color when I was a child. If such a thing were possible, I should say they had deepened into black since I went out to India. But, of course, that is impossible!" and she laughed.

"You are remarkably pretty, my dear," said the baroness, with a sort of fond pride in her regards. "Your hair is of a peculiar golden tint which is singularly rich. Your face looks as if, to use a worn expression, you had always been fed upon milk and roses. You will create a sensation down in Lincolnshire, I can assure you."

Lady Folliott did not once think of calling her pretended niece a beauty, for her standard of beauty was exalted and demanded a nobler, grander type. But she thought her, as she had said, remarkably pretty, although in her secret soul she could not but acknowledge to herself that that prettiness was after a very pronounced order. Were it not for the girl's seeming innocence and shrinking modesty, for her kitten-like clinging and caressing, she might have deemed her

appearance bordering upon boldness. For a fastidious taste, the false Miss Bermyngham's hair was too ruddy in its yellow tinting; the roses in her cheeks were too fixed and unvarying; the whiteness of her skin too marble-like, but the artist had done her work well and one could not suspect that Nature herself had not given to the usurper her richness of coloring.

Taken altogether, with her artistically gotten-up face, her drooping eyelids, her modest, clinging ways, her pretty childish impulsiveness, her soft caressings, the false Miss Bermyngham was a dangerous woman—a Dazzling Fraud—fair and sweet to look upon, like the fabled apples of the Dead Sea, but, like those apples, rotten at the core.

“I hope I shall create a sensation down in Lincolnshire,” said the impostor, with a seeming artlessness. “And I am glad, dear Aunt Folliott, that you think me pretty. For beauty brings love, and I could not live without love.”

She pressed one of the baroness's hands against her cheek and to her lips.

“My dear child,” cried Lady Folliott, flushing with a quick rush of feeling, “who could help loving you? You were made to pet and love. How strange that I expected to find you plain and insignificant in appearance. But that was because you so persistently refused to send me your photograph. And all the while you were as pretty and charming as a fairy. And now, dear, tell me all about yourself. Why have you persisted in remaining in India since your father's death? That idea of yours that you had inherited his disease of the heart and could not bear the excitement of travel, is all sheerest nonsense. You have pushed through from Marseilles without stopping—and such a journey

would exhaust even me—yet here you are as blooming as a rose.”

“I have borne the journey better than I expected, Aunt Folliott. I was sure that I had inherited papa’s heart disease,” said the impostor, “and I do have the strangest pains at my heart now and then, but I am much better than I thought. The desire to see you, to be clasped in your arms, dear Aunt Folliott, made me rush through France without stopping. Yet when I reached London I was nearly exhausted. I was unable to go on by the first train to Lincolnshire, as I desired. I forget all my fatigue now in looking upon your dear face. I am repaid for all my haste.”

“Have you had any indications of this malady of the heart since you left India?” inquired the baroness, anxiously. “I mean, have you been really ill?”

“Oh, no. I was extremely well throughout the voyage. Indeed, I am becoming convinced that I was mistaken, and that my heart is not diseased at all.”

“I am glad to hear it. Your fancy has made me extremely nervous and anxious. Did you leave your friends in India well?”

“Not so well as I could wish,” said the usurper. “You know that after papa’s death I did not dismiss our servants and close our house, but I maintained my household as before. I engaged a chaperon, however, out of consideration to public opinion. This chaperon was a widowed lady, whose husband had been an army officer. She died a month before I left Calcutta, and I really think that the break in my life caused by her death, was the chief cause of my leaving India. Our old friend, Colonel Fordyce, was lying at the point of death when I sailed, and General Graeme will never live to return to England. His liver is completely gone!”

“You wrote me that you would be attended on your

journey by your papa's confidential clerk and by a maid," said Lady Folliott. "Are both with you here?"

The impostor put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"A strange fatality has attended me since I left India," she said, in a voice that sounded broken and sorrowful. It seems as if, like the poet, I never loved anything but it was sure to die. It is only a year since poor papa died, dear Aunt Folliott. After his death, I grew to lean upon papa's confidential clerk, Jonas Fisherwich. He was an elderly man, not married, and perfectly devoted to my business interests. Before leaving India, some presentiment of speedy death seemed to come upon me. He disposed of all my property in India and transferred my funds into the English consols, explaining everything to me and putting matters completely within my understanding and under my own personal control. I am twenty-three years of age, you know, Aunt Folliott, and papa early trained me so that I might be able to manage my property after he should be taken from me."

"Yes, I know," said Lady Folliott. "But where is Fisherwich?"

"His presentiment of evil were realized. He died on the voyage before reaching Suez."

"How shocking! And you were attended during the remainder of your journey only by your maid?"

The impostor assented.

"I had an English maid in India," she said—"my old nurse, you know, Aunt Folliott. She was deeply attached to me, but she would not return to England with me. She will live and die in India. Her son is a clerk in the employ of certain trades-people, and my old nurse will live with him, and look after his comfort, he being unmarried."

"Then old Norton is not with you? Did you have a strange woman to attend upon you?"

"Yes, Aunt Folliott. Having made up my mind to come to England, and having Fisherwich to look after my comfort, I looked about for a maid to suit me. Finding none, I advertised, stating my requirements. Among the applicants for the situation was a girl named Agatha Walden, who came well recommended. I liked her appearance. She was plain in looks, but she knew her place, and was anxious to please me. She was lady-like and refined. I supposed that I was imprudent—I am a creature of impulse—but I engaged the girl upon her written recommendations and she agreed to come with me to England. She was a week in my service at Calcutta, and Norton taught her her new duties. This girl was invaluable to me throughout my journey home, but I discovered on the voyage that she was afflicted with some incurable malady, and that her object in coming to England was that she might die in her native land among her kindred."

"How very sad. Poor girl," said Lady Folliott. "Is she with you still? or has she gone to her friends?"

"How can I tell you all that I have had to bear, dear Aunt Folliott? This girl grew more and more ill as we neared our destination, and she died in the railway coach just as we steamed into London."

Lady Folliott was shocked.

"I suppose that she was buried yesterday," continued the false Miss Bermyngham. "I knew nothing of her friends, and I have sometimes feared that she never gave me her real name. So I gave the kind physician, whom I summoned to her aid, money to bury her decently, and she was so buried without doubt."

"And you are entirely alone here, my dear child?"

"Oh, no. I have another maid, a Frenchwoman,

whom I engaged yesterday. I am such a helpless little thing, you know, Aunt Folliott," cooed the pretty hypocrite. "I can't wait upon myself, and I decided to secure a servant before going down into Lincolnshire."

"I hope you have chosen a good, honest person," said Lady Folliott. "You are inexperienced in the ways of the world, my dear. I trust you attended to your maid's references?"

"Thoroughly, Aunt Folliott. I inquired out her past. She's an honest, worthy person, and I know that you will commend my judgment in choosing her. And now as I have told you all about myself, tell me about yourself. You look well and happy."

"Because I am both," replied Lady Folliott. "My life at Folliott Court is very tranquil and happy. We have a pleasant county society, and if I have at times been lonely I shall be so no longer now that I shall have you for a companion. But, my dear, I am not yet done with questioning you. I have an important question to ask you. You have returned to England to stay. Have you come to me heart-whole?" and the baroness betrayed in her manner with what anxiety she asked that question.

"Yes, Aunt Folliott, I am heart-whole."

Lady Folliott drew a long breath of relief.

"I have a plan for your future, my dear," she said, kindly. "I have marked out a brilliant destiny for you, one that will insure your happiness and that will flatter your pride. As I indicated in my letters to you, I have a husband picked out for you. Is there any reason, so far as you are concerned, why you should not marry him?"

The girl drooped her face modestly.

"None whatever," she said, with apparent shyness

"So much the better. Perhaps I am precipitate in

my confidences, Nerea, but I want you to know my hopes and wishes before we arrive at Folliott Court. This is a matter to me of the utmost importance—”

She paused as a knock was heard upon the door. A servant entered to lay the table for dinner.

“I will retire to my own rooms across the hall to make some change in my toilet, Nerea,” said the baroness. “My maid is waiting for me, and I shall return to you within fifteen minutes. And this evening, my dear, we will exchange a long chapter of confidences.”

She pressed her lips to the brow of the impostor and withdrew, going to her own rooms.

“That ordeal is over!” thought the false Miss Bermyngham, with a thrill of delight. “I have hoodwinked my Lady Folliott! She accepts me as her niece without a shadow of suspicion! I am fixed in my new position! Now I can defy the whole world!”

CHAPTER X.

FORESTALLED.

Wellesley Terrace, Grand street, Bayswater, was a quiet and highly respectable neighborhood, within eight minutes' walk of Kensington Gardens. The Terrace consisted of a dozen detached houses, each having a small square grass plot in front, and separated from each other and from the street by tall brick walls.

These houses, three stories in height, of bright red brick, with bay-windows extending from foundation to roof, were for the most part occupied by professional

men. There was a doctor at one dwelling, an artist at another, two or three legal gentleman in others, a half-pay army officer at another. Number twelve was occupied as a girl's school. Number four was Mrs. Punnet's very select lodging-house.

It was to this highly respectable neighborhood then, and to Mrs. Punnet's select lodging-house, that the fugitive Beatrix Rohan had been directed by her eccentric traveling companion, Mrs. Trevor.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when the cab containing Beatrix entered Grand street and pursued its journey at a decreasing rate of speed. The evening was that upon which occurred the events narrated in the preceding chapter. There was a fine, drizzling mist in the air. The gas-lamps emitted a pale and sickly glimmer. The April night seemed suddenly to have grown drear and cheerless. Beatrix pressed her face against the glass and looked out with wistful, intent gaze. The cabman slackened the pace of his horse to a walk as he neared Wellesley Terrace, and the girl noticed the lighted, pleasant bay windows, across some of which light forms were flitting, and a strange, homesick feeling swelled her heart.

For a year before her imprisonment at the chateau Valbeck, she had traveled with her relatives throughout Europe. Previous to that year of travel she had been the inmate for five years of a French school. She had never had a home since her infancy. A home seemed to her an earthly paradise.

The cab drew up before the gate of number four. The cabman alighted and pulled the garden-bell. A boy in buttons answered the summons. Beatrix paid her fare, alighted, and hurried up the garden-walk to the shelter of the doorway, and sounded the brass knocker nervously.

A neat-looking housemaid, wearing a spotless white cap, opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Punnet at home?" asked the young lady.

"Yes, Miss," was the answer, the housemaid taking in the fact at a glance that the visitor was a lady, and looking beyond Beatrix for her escort, "If you will step up to the drawing-room, Miss, I will call her."

The maid ushered her up a winding stair to the drawing-room, which was a pleasant apartment overlooking the street, and having its entire front occupied by the large bay-window. A fire was burning in the grate, and two gas-jets in the gasolier overhead were lighted.

Beatrix sat down in a large chair before the hearth. She had become comfortably warmed when the rustling of a woman's garments were heard, and the lodging-house keeper entered.

Beatrix arose, bowing courteously.

Mrs. Punnet was an elderly woman, dressed in black silk, portly of figure, with a large, round, good-natured face, in which were set a pair of very pale blue eyes, whose every glance was of keenest scrutiny.

She returned the girl's bow with an elaborate courtsy.

"I am the bearer of a letter to you, Mrs. Punnet, from Mrs. Trevor," said the fugitive heiress, producing the missive. "You will discover in the letter my errand."

Mrs. Punnet invited her to resume her seat, and Beatrix complied, while the former read the letter.

When she had finished it, she said, pleasantly :

"Your application for a room is very well timed, Miss Trist. I have three rooms vacant, the family who occupied them having left me yesterday for a house of their own. I shall be pleased to show them to you. They were put in order to-day, and I expected to find tenants

for them before the week's end. I have a single room upon the upper floor at the back at a guinea, and a suite of rooms directly above this at five guineas, which includes attendance. I am sorry that I have nothing between. The third floor front is let."

"Please show me your second floor, Mrs. Punnet. I think that will suit me."

The lodging-house keeper summoned a servant, and ordered her to light the vacant rooms. Then she conducted Beatrix to the suite she had mentioned.

It was upon the second floor—that is, the floor above the drawing-room, and consisted of a parlor, bed-room, dressing-room, and bath-room.

The parlor was made charming by the big bay-window. The floor was covered by a bright, new crimson carpet; there were crimson curtains at the window, crimson chairs and couches. The walls were covered with a crimson flock paper, picked out with gold, and a few good engravings in gilt frames were hung upon them.

Altogether, the room was pleasant, and cosy, and snug, and its look of warmth and brightness were very pleasing to Beatrix.

The bedroom was separated from the parlor by folding-doors, and was spotlessly clean. The carpet here was new also, the bedstead of polished brass, the linen white and lavender-scented. The dressing-room was quite small, and had windows opening upon a yard at the back. This last was furnished equally well with the other rooms of the suite, having long, crimson curtains, a couple of engravings on the wall, a long, swinging toilet-glass, and a long wall-mirror.

"Of course the attendance will be of the best," said Mrs. Punnet, exhibiting the handsome and commodious wardrobe. "The housemaid gives especial care to

these rooms, and is very prompt at answering the bell. Your meals will all be cooked for you, and served at any hour you may wish. I will myself do your marketing, and will present the bills as you may require."

"I will take the rooms, Madame," said Beatrix. "I have dismissed the cab, and will enter into possession now, if you please. I have traveled from Brussels to-day, and should like a hot supper, if convenient. Send me up anything you may have."

Mrs. Punnet withdrew to execute the order, after touching a match to the neatly-laid fire.

Beatrix laid aside her hat and cloak and traveling-bag, which was still attached to her belt. She brushed the dust from her garments and made a hasty toilet in her dressing-room.

When she returned to her parlor she found her table neatly laid, and the housemaid in the act of depositing a steaming tray upon it.

"Supper is ready, Miss," said the maid, removing the covers. "Is there anything more you will have?"

Beatrix smiled a negative. The supper seemed to her absolutely sumptuous. She was still half-famished. Her month's starvation upon bread and water at the Chateau Valbeck had made her very thin and weak, and her longing for food was something ravenous. Mrs. Punnet had sent up to her a juicy beefsteak, stewed potatoes, toasted muffins and hot coffee, with an apology for having nothing better to offer. Beatrix dismissed the housemaid and ate her supper leisurely, her weakness beginning to give place to a growing strength and cheerfulness.

After her table had been cleared again, and Mrs. Punnet had been up again to inquire if Miss Trist wanted anything, exhibiting a respectful and kindly

interest in her beautiful young lodger, Beatrix sat down again in the warm glow of her fire.

"This is a pleasant and a safe refuge," she thought, with a warm glow of gratitude to the Providence that had so signally befriended her. "How God has watched over and guided me! How difficult was my escape from the Chateau Valbeck! What perils I encountered then—and afterward on that lonely road—and afterward in the farmer's cart—and after that at the Antwerp inn—and again at the Hotel de Flandre at Brussels! God has been good to me!"

Her soul swelled with her grateful love to him!

She thought of her past, of her future. The little clock upon the mantelpiece struck the hour of eleven, and she aroused herself as from a trance. She went into her snug little dressing-room and disrobed. After a bath she went to bed, and slept until a late hour of the following morning.

She had locked the doors of her bedroom which opened into her parlor upon retiring, but had left her parlor door unlocked. After she had fully dressed herself she came out into her parlor. It had been swept and dusted, and put into perfect order. A fire glowed redly in the grate. The breakfast-table was spread, and upon it lay the morning newspaper.

Beatrix greeted her housemaid with the gentle courtesy that always distinguished her manner, and sat down to the perusal of the morning news. Her breakfast was brought up almost immediately, and was well cooked and well served.

After the meal, the young lady ordered a cab to be brought for her. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and Beatrix was anxious to call upon the trustees of her property without further delay.

"I must see them, if possible, before the Brands can

see them," she said to herself. "In any case, I am sure they will protect me."

Her toilet was already made. She had no need of her water-proof cloak, the day being fine, and having put on her hat she descended to the cab, which was in waiting.

Her trustees were two in number. Both were men of the most uncompromising integrity, men who abhorred speculations, and who were even old-fashioned in their ideas, preferring government consols at three per cent. as an investment rather than the stocks and shares which, paying high rates of interest, tempt so many of our modern business men.

Beatrice knew that her fortune was secured to her in such a manner that her trustees, even were they inclined to prove unfaithful to their trust, could not alienate one penny of it from her. But she knew also that they were men of marked probity. Her wealth was safe in their hands. Would they not take equal care of the owner of that wealth?

She knew the addresses of these gentlemen.

Mr. Dunlap, the elder, was married, and lived in Cavendish Square.

Mr. Hillsley, the younger, was a bachelor, and maintained an establishment in Upper Berkeley Street.

She resolved to go to Mr. Dunlap first, and gave the cabman an order to proceed to Cavendish Square.

Upon alighting at Mr. Dunlap's residence, she saw that the house was closed, as if uninhabited. Her knock was answered by an old woman, evidently a housekeeper, who informed her that Mr. Dunlap was gone upon the Continent with his family, to be absent a year.

"Can you give me his address?" she asked.

"No ma'am," was the reply. "He's in one place one

day and another the next. He was in Greece when he last wrote, and was thinking of going further east."

Beatrix inclined her head and descended the steps, her face shadowed.

"Upper Berkeley Street," she said, giving also the number.

The cab next stopped before a handsome mansion in the street designated. Beatrix ascended the spotless white stone steps and pulled the bell. She noticed that the shutters were drawn up at the windows, and that the house seemed occupied.

A liveried footman opened the door.

"Is Mr. Hillsley at home?" asked the visitor.

"He is not, ma'am," was the respectful answer. "He is in the city usually at this hour."

Beatrix hesitated. She did not like to go to Mr. Hillsley's office. She could not tell him her story in a place where he would be constantly liable to interruptions. She wanted to see him in the privacy of his own house, where, if necessary, she might plead to him for friendship and protection.

"When will he return home?" she asked.

"At six, ma'am. He drives in the park at four, but is always at home to dine at seven. He spends his evenings at home."

"Then I will call again this evening," said Beatrix
"I will not leave my name."

She descended the steps and drove away.

"A real lady," thought the footman. "I couldn't see her face her veil was so thick, but she had the low, calm voice of a genuine lady. I suppose she's another applicant for that situation of governess in the family of Mr. Hillsley's sister down in Herts. That makes three young ladies that have called to-day in answer to mas-

ter's advertisement. They can't all of them get it, more's the pity."

Beatrix returned to Wellesley Terrace. The day dragged slowly enough to her. At eight o'clock in the evening, her cab arrived for her, and she proceeded again to Upper Berkeley Street.

The footman she had seen in the morning now gave her admittance.

"I mentioned to Mr. Hillsley that you had called in regard to the situation of governess, Miss," he remarked, "and he will see you. He has sent away one young lady this evening as didn't suit. He is engaged just now. Just step in here and wait until he is at liberty!"

He conducted her down the long hall, to a room near its further end into which he ushered her, then returned to his post.

The apartment in which Beatrix thus found herself was ill-lighted. A door into the adjoining library was slightly ajar, and a long ruddy gleam of light entered through the aperture. The fugitive heiress took a seat among the shadows and waited.

She was all anxiety and impatience. She wished that she had sent in her name to Mr. Hillsley.

In the midst of her troubled thoughts, the sound of voices reached her hearing.

Someone was talking in the library.

She recognized the voice as that of Mr. Hillsley, but she did not understand his words.

"You see, Mr. Hillsley," answered another voice, whose smoothness and gentleness were like the softness of the tiger, "the girl is my wife's niece, and as willful a creature as ever lived. Heaven knows the trouble we have had with her. Still, she is Selina's niece, and we must find her, and endeavor to do our duty by her. You have not seen her, you say. Then she has not yet

reached England. Her first thought would be, I think, to come to England and to you with her lying stories."

Beatrice was as if chained to the spot.

In coming to Mr. Hillsley, she had entered into the very presence of her enemy. The voice which had last spoken was the voice of Colonel Brand.

CHAPTER XI.

AT BAY !

Beatrice was unable to retreat, or to reveal her presence, in the first shock of her discovery that her appeal to Mr. Hillsley had been forestalled by her enemy.

Colonel Brand here in London, under the same roof with herself, and only a few feet distant from her ! She had encountered many and terrible perils to escape from him, and here he was in the next room, his voice reaching her very hearing !

She shrank back amid the shadows of the little, ill-lighted back parlor of Mr. Hillsley's house, and totally unconscious of the near proximity of a third person, the two men continued their conversation.

"Your communication distresses me greatly, Colonel Brand," said Mr. Hillsley, in a disturbed voice. "I regret exceedingly the absence from England at this time, of my friend and associate-trustee, Mr. Dunlap ; but, as you have already ascertained, he is somewhere in Greece, and his exact address is not known."

"I am very positive," said Colonel Brand, in a silvery voice, "that Beatrice would hasten to England. Finding Mr. Dunlap absent, she would throw herself upon

your protection, Mr. Hillsley. She is sufficiently artful to endeavor to arouse your chivalrous pity with some lying tale. Oh, the misery that unhappy girl has caused us! My poor Selina's hair is streaked with gray through her many anxieties on account of Beatrix!"

Colonel Brand sighed heavily.

"Are you sure, Colonel, that Miss Rohan has arrived in England?" asked Mr. Hillsley.

"By no means, sir. She may be in Belgium, in Holland, or in France. We were residing, as I explained, temporarily in a romantic old chateau within twenty miles of Antwerp, when my poor niece fled from us. My son is still at Ostend, watching there for her to embark for England. Mrs. Brand is to-day in France, watching the French ports. A servant is at Amsterdam, also looking for her. I crossed from Ostend to-day, and am come at once to you, in the hope of hearing something of our miserable young relative."

"And I have not seen nor heard from her, Colonel. Can she have fled with a lover?"

"It is possible," replied Colonel Brand, knowing very well that he lied. "I have long thought that she had a secret lover. Selina loves her niece as if she were her daughter, and is heartbroken upon her account, yet I assure you, Mr. Hillsley, the girl is hot-tempered, rebellious, wayward, and altogether froward. Her escapade may be due to her wildly romantic notions. I never saw such a girl before in my life!"

"I supposed," said Mr. Hillsley, quietly, "that Miss Rohan was engaged to marry your son—"

"And so she was," said Colonel Brand, unblushingly. "She was solemnly betrothed to him by her own desire. Randall fairly worships her. He is ready to forgive her escapade and to marry her to-morrow. With her youth and beauty, Mr. Hillsley, I tremble for her."

Where is she to-night? Heaven only knows! She seems to have repented her betrothal to my son—she pretends to hate him—she even may deny that she ever promised to marry him. If she comes to you, Mr. Hillsley, I beg you to send for me to confront her!”

“I will do so,” was the reply. “I do not see why a man who abhors all noise and confusion, all trouble of every kind, should be drawn into an unpleasant affair like this. Is it not enough that I look after her property without having to look after her? She will attain her majority a year hence, and I must say, Colonel, that I shall be glad to relinquish the care of her future into her own hands, since she is the person you describe her.”

The cheeks of the fugitive heiress flushed hotly. Her soul swelled with indignation. Mr. Hillsley had promised to send for Colonel Brand to confront her upon her appearance at the house of the former. As she must meet her enemy at some time, why not meet him at once?

Trusting to the justice of her cause, believing that the right must triumph, having a conviction that Mr. Hillsley could not hear her story and disbelieve it, indignant at the false accusations against her, Beatrix glided swiftly across the room and pushed open the folding-doors, pausing upon the threshold in a full blaze of light.

The eyes of the two men turned toward her.

Colonel Brand leaped to his feet.

“Beatrix!” he gasped.

The girl smiled bitterly.

“Yes, it is Beatrix, Colonel Brand,” she said, her young voice full of haughty scorn, her dusk eyes glowing with a strange sternness.

Mr. Hillsley arose also, and regarded her keenly.



"STAND BACK! I WARN YOU—BOTH OF YOU!"—*See Page 105.*

He beheld a slim, graceful girl, of a rare and extraordinary beauty, with low, wide brows ; great purple-gray eyes full of lights and shadows ; a rose-leaf complexion, upon which the color came and went ; and a mass of tawny, burnished hair, which rippled away from her forehead. A beautiful face, exquisite as a rare cameo in its clear-cut features, but a proud and spirited face also, full of fire and indignation, of outraged pride and haughty anger.

And Beatrix returned Mr. Hillsley's regards with equal intentness.

She beheld a little, elderly man, with a rosy face and stout figure, who had a well-fed look, and whom one would judge to be a gourmand.

Mr. Hillsley, as he had indicated in his remarks to Colonel Brand, was a disciple of the Epicurean philosophy. He liked good living. He hated care and trouble. He abhorred all noise and confusion. He hated the sound of loud speaking. He always walked—when he walked at all—upon the sunny side of the street. His carriages were cushioned luxuriously and furnished with noiseless springs. His servants walked in list slippers in his house and spoke in whispers. He was persuaded that he was endowed with a marvellously fine organization, and shielded himself from rude contact with the world with sedulous care. At his office, a cordon of clerks guarded him from rude approach ; at his own home he treated himself as a being formed of the finest porcelain which no rude wind must be allowed to jar.

This, then, was the gentleman whom Beatrix expected to befriend her ! This Sybaritic, indolent person, she expected to battle for her !

"You are Beatrix Rohan, Mrs. Brand's run-away niece?" said Mr. Hillsley, interrogatively.

"I am Beatrix Rohan," said the girl, lifting her

tawny head proudly. "And you, I suppose, are Mr. Hillsley. I called here this morning, but you were gone to the City. I called again this evening, as directed by your servant, and was ushered into this room adjoining your library. I have heard something of your conversation with Colonel Brand. He has not told you the truth—"

"Beatrice !" cried Colonel Brand, reproachfully. "My child, do you mean to say that I have lied ?"

Beatrice bestowed one sweeping, scornful glance upon her enemy, whose black ferret eyes were glittering, and whose long thin nose was working itself nervously above his full, black beard and whose low, retreating forehead exhibited a threatening scowl, and then she coolly turned her back upon him.

"Mr. Hillsley," she said, trying to speak calmly, yet unable to conquer the thrill of indignation that made her voice tremulous, "I am come here to claim your protection from these Brands. You were my father's friend. He entrusted the care of my fortune to you. Will you not take charge of his daughter also ? Will you not protect me from these people who are eager to destroy my life or my happiness ?"

"My dear young lady !" expostulated Mr. Hillsley, in a shocked voice. "You absolutely frighten me. Your—your vehemence renders me nervous. Calm yourself, Miss Rohan. And sit down. Take this chair and compose yourself."

He wheeled a chair towards her. Beatrice sat down in it, but she could not calm her eager, earnest, flashing eyes, nor repress the excitement and prayerfulness that shone from every lovely feature of her face.

"I know that Colonel Brand has prejudiced you against me, Mr. Hillsley," she said, "but I beseech you to hear my story. I will make it brief. I was never

betrothed to Randall Brand. I would as soon wed with a tiger of the jungle as with Randall Brand ! He is cruel, wicked, a savage at heart, unscrupulous and unprincipled. I hate him ! I loathe him !”

“ You see, Mr. Hillsley,” whispered Colonel Brand, hissing. “ She is mad—mad as a March hare.”

“ Dear me ! dear me !” cried Mr. Hillsley, distressfully. “ My dear Miss Rohan, pray moderate your excitement. I beg you to express yourself in milder terms. A young lady should hate no one. You wrong your cousin. I consider Mr. Brand a gentleman.”

“ Because you don’t know him,” said Beatrix, undauntedly. “ Colonel Brand has given you his opinion of me. Permit me to give you my opinion of him. He is false to his trust as a guardian, he is an oppressor of the orphan, he is the worthy father of his son, he is eager to compass my death or to force me into an obnoxious marriage——”

“ Oh, Beatrix ! Beatrix !” cried Colonel Brand, putting his handkerchief to his eyes, apparently overcome with grief. “ I have loved you as my own child, and now I realize the words of Shakespere when he says, ‘ How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child !’ ”

Mr. Hillsley looked from one to the other of his guests with a troubled face.

His sympathies were all in favor of Colonel Brand. That gentleman had made good use of his opportunity, and had completely forestalled Beatrix in her revelations. Mr. Hillsley had known the Brands for many years, and believed them to be honorable, upright, and wealthy. They were of good family, with aristocratic connections. He believed them incapable of wrongdoing, and considered Beatrix a headstrong, self-willed, romantic girl, with an ill-balanced brain.

"My dear Colonel, my dear Miss Rohan," said Mr. Hillsley, "let me reconcile you two. Miss Beatrice, will you not apologize to your good uncle for the trouble you have caused him? And, Colonel, will you not forgive and take back to your home this wayward young lady, who cannot be oblivious of all your love and care for her, despite her recent action?"

"Willingly!" cried Colonel Brand. "I will take the dear girl back to my heart and home—to the sorrowing aunt who awaits her with open arms and more than a mother's love! I can forgive all. Beatrice, will you come?"

The girl paid no heed to the question.

"Mr. Hillsley," she said, "you are mistaken in this man. For a month before I effected my escape from the house he had taken in Belgium, he and his wife kept me closely confined in an upper room of that dwelling, and the only food they allowed me was bread and water. They meant to starve me into consenting to marry their son. See how thin I am!" and she held up her nearly transparent hands and shrunken wrists. "Upon the night of my escape, they reduced even the scanty fare they had allowed me one-third! I cut out two of the iron bars covering my windows with an old, broken table-knife. I let myself down into the courtyard by a rope I had manufactured out of my clothes. I climbed the high outer wall, just escaping the fangs of their watch-dog. I ran through the howling storm and the darkness until I dropped exhausted. I scarcely understand yet how I escaped my pursuers. But I have reached your house in safety. And in my father's name, Mr. Hillsley, in the great name of humanity, I implore you to protect and befriend me!"

"But, my dear Miss Rohan, what would you have me do?"

"I would have you apply to the Orphan's Court—is there not such a court?—for a new guardian for me. Let me become your ward, Mr. Hillsley, or a ward of Chancery!"

The girl's voice was wild with imploring. A sense of her peril pressed sharply upon her. Her dusk-gray eyes were full of agonized beseeching. Mr. Hillsley was strangely disturbed, yet half angry that his love of ease should be so outraged.

"Poor child!" sighed Colonel Brand, and his long, thin nose arched itself restlessly above his bearded mouth. "My poor romantic Beatrix! Must her infirmity of mind be declared to the curious world?"

"Miss Rohan," said Mr. Hillsley, upon whom the colonel's *sotto voce* utterances had full effect, "if you have indeed received such treatment as you aver, the law will come to your aid. But you have made very serious charges against your relatives. Can you prove these charges? Did any one ever witness these scenes of oppression at the hands of your guardians?"

"No one could witness them, sir. I was shut up alone in my own rooms. No servant was ever allowed to see me. My aunt brought me my humble fare with her own hands."

"Was your aunt as cruel as you allege your uncle to have been? I remember Mrs. Brand as a handsome woman of society, courteous, well-bred. She is, in fact, a distant relative of my own," added Mr. Hillsley, "and I certainly cannot believe anything against her."

"Yet," cried the girl bitterly, "she is a hard, pitiless, arrogant woman. She is as selfish and unscrupulous as her husband and son—"

"Come, come!" interposed Mr. Hillsley, for the first time betraying any personal feeling, his face flushing. "This wholesale denunciation but injures your case,

Miss Rohan. Mrs. Brand is my own relative. I know her to be incapable of harshness or wrong-doing. She has been directress of a dozen benevolent societies. She is uniformly kind to the poor. I might have believed that there was some foundation of fact for your story, if you had not attacked Mrs Brand. But now—"

He shook his head significantly.

"Do you not believe me, sir?"

"How can I, Miss Rohan? All the facts bear against you. You have no witness to prove your truthfulness. I am sorry to discredit your tale, but I am persuaded that were your mind better balanced you would cut off your right hand rather than to assail your kind relatives as you have done!"

Mr. Hillsley spoke kindly, yet with a severity that proved his sincerity.

Beatrix hastened to utter a protest and to tell her story anew, calmly and intelligibly, appealing to her trustee with all the fervor of her passionate young nature. Colonel Brand frequently interjected his comments, of which she took no notice, and his long nose worked itself convulsively and incessantly, after his strange peculiarity.

When Beatrix had finished, Mr. Hillsley said gravely :
"Still I fail to be convinced, Miss Rohan, that your wild story is true. Now listen to me. What evidence have you to offer in support of your declarations? None whatever save your unsupported word. I am putting the case now, you see, as it would be put in a case-at-law, or indeed as any sensible person would put it. On one side is your unsupported word. Upon the other is the evidence of three persons, a lady and two gentlemen, all of assured position, of benevolent character, of high connections, and possessed of wealth.

Already your case is lost. But add to the statement I have made concerning Mr. and Mrs. Brand and their son the fact that Mrs. Brand is your nearest living relative, your late father's only sister, the lady chosen by him to be your guardian, to watch over your youthful years, to guide your youthful life, to be in short a mother to you in place of the mother of whom you were so early bereaved. Your father knew his sister well. In his last days, when approaching death caused him to be anxious about the future of his only child, when he must have had a clear insight into men and things, whom did he fix upon to take his place toward his orphan child? Whom but Colonel and Mrs. Brand, his beloved sister and her husband? You were placed then in charge of these relatives by your own father. Miss Rohan, it seems to me that you have treated these kind friends with a base ingratitude. It seems to me that you ought to return to these foster-parents with prayers of forgiveness for your folly?"

"You refuse utterly to believe me?" demanded Beatrix, her dusk and tearless eyes glittering, her face growing very white. "Have I failed alike to touch your heart and your belief, Mr. Hillsley? Have you no pity for a wronged, unhappy girl, whose only crime is that she is an heiress? These Brands are scheming for my property. If I will give it to them and myself with it, I shall be allowed to live. But if I refuse to marry their son, and I am returned into their keeping, they will never allow me to attain my majority! I shall die within the year!"

"The girl is mad!" ejaculated Colonel Brand, in accents of profound horror. "My poor Beatrix! My unhappy child!"

Mr. Hillsley arose abruptly.

"Miss Rohan," he said, sternly, "I cannot listen to

these terrible aspersions upon the characters of my friends. I can only believe that you have not entire control over your mind. I am a peace-loving man, fond of quiet; but I assure you if I credited one word of your wild tale, I would move heaven and earth, if necessary, to free you. But I don't believe it. Such deeds of wrong and oppression are not perpetrated in this prosaic and commonplace nineteenth century! You are too romantic by nature. Or you have an unbalanced mind. I decline to interfere in the case. I advise you to return quietly to Antwerp with your guardian. The year of your minority will pass swiftly, and you will then become absolutely your own mistress!"

"You hear, Beatrix?" said Colonel Brand. "Mr. Hillsley will not help you. Return with me to Belgium, to your aunt—your doting second mother. She will forgive you and take you back to her heart. If you have conceived such an aversion to your cousin Randall, I will send him back to England. I will study all your whims and caprices, I will aim to 'minister to a mind diseased' with all the skill I can acquire!"

"You are the generous man I supposed, Colonel," said Mr. Hillsley, warmly. "You are incapable of treasuring up the accusations of this unhappy child against her. You will continue to act towards her the part of a loving, forbearing parent. Some day she will thank you for this goodness."

"And now," said Colonel Brand, also arising, "we will not trouble you further, Mr. Hillsley, in this unhappy affair. I propose to return to Belgium, starting this very night by the tidal train. We have, in fact, no time to lose. Allow me to thank you, sir, for the expressions of your continued faith in Mrs. Brand and myself. Our honor is especially dear to us.

To have it aspersed is to attack us in a vital point. Rest assured, Mr. Hillsley, we shall continue to deserve your good opinion. We shall be very loving and tender to our dear, misguided niece."

He turned upon the trustee a countenance indicative of pity and unbounded affection for his "misguided niece"—a countenance made up of gentleness and profoundest sorrow. Then he slowly turned the glances of his ferret eyes on Beatrix, and his face became like the face of a Satyr. It expressed a fiendish delight and exultation. It abounded in an awful threatening.

Beatrix shrank back appalled.

"Come, my darling," said Colonel Brand, softly, his silvery tones unruffled. "Say good-bye to Mr. Hillsley. My cab is still waiting. We will go."

"Never!" ejaculated the girl. "Never! I will not go to Belgium with you, Colonel Brand! I'll die first!"

"Miss Rohan!" cried Mr. Hillsley, reprovingly.

"You have refused to befriend me, sir," said Beatrix, "and I shall appeal to the first person I meet. I will struggle for my liberty and life. Colonel Brand, you shall not take me with you alive! I will scream for help—I will call for the police! Stand back! I warn you—both of you—not to touch me!"

She retreated toward the door, white, wild, and panting, her eyes like those of a wild deer, her attitude that of some hunted creature who had turned at bay.

"Stand back!" she repeated. "Move a step nearer and I will call out *murder*!"



CHAPTER XII.

THE USURPER'S VOW.

Lady Folliott returned to the private parlor of the false Miss Bermyngham before the expiration of the time she had specified. She had exchanged her traveling costume of brown silk and cashmere for a trained robe of prune-colored velvet, with high corsage and close sleeves, the neck and wrists plentifully trimmed with point lace.

Her gray hair, being very abundant, was arranged with due regard to the fashion of the day ; and, being massed upon the top of her head, added greatly to the queenliness of her appearance. She was stately, handsome, dignified, with a certain grandeur of countenance and carriage, that were very impressive. She was noble and commanding. The impostor dimly felt that her ladyship could be a very powerful friend or she could be a dangerous enemy.

Something more was necessary than simply to convince the baroness that the usurper was the true heiress. The girl felt that she must win the lady's love and trust ; must ingratiate herself in the lady's confidence ; must strengthen her false position at every point. To omit doing this could not bring suspicion upon her claims ; but to accomplish these desirable things would be an additional triumph, an extra security.

She ran forward to meet Lady Folliott, in a pretty childish way, a long red-gold curl that hung over her shoulders flying, her pretty pink-and-white face all childish delight and eagerness.

"Dear Aunt Folliott!" she cried, presenting her red mouth for a kiss in the most artless manner possible. "It seems as if you had been gone an age! I could hardly restrain my impatience for your return. And what a lovely, lovely lady you are, to be sure! I am so proud of you, Aunt Folliott!"

This little outburst of girlish enthusiasm, which had been planned carefully by the practised actress, seemed to Lady Folliott very charming. She caressed the girl with genuine pleasure, as she said, smiling:

"You are three-and-twenty years of age, Nerea, but a child yet. I hope it may be many years before you lose your sweet artlessness."

The waiter entered at this juncture, and deposited the soup-tureen upon the table.

The ladies took their places, and were served.

The dinner was elaborate, the pretended heiress having ordered it for her own especial gratification. The girl chattered incessantly throughout the meal in a gay, light-hearted way and sipped her wine, and lingered over her dessert, evidently greatly enjoying the gratification of her appetite.

After dinner, when the waiter had removed the equipage, even to the table, Lady Folliott throned herself in an easy-chair, and the girl drew up a hassock and sat down at the lady's feet, laying her cheek against the lady's knees.

"Do you know, dear Aunt Folliott," she said, softly, "that I mean to be a daughter to you? And I want you to be a mother to me, and love me, and tell me my faults, and make much of me, you know. Papa always

petted me. I can't live without being petted. I am only just a foolish little thing, dear Aunt Folliott, and I would do anything for any one who loves me."

"My dear little girl," cried the baroness, with tears in her eyes. "You were made to be loved, and I love you already. How have you lived since your father's death without sheltering care and protecting tenderness? I shall guard you very carefully, my darling. I wonder how you have lived to your present age without loving and being loved."

"Oh, I have been loved!" cried the impostor. "I have had hosts of lovers, Aunt Folliott. There was even an old general who wanted me to marry him as his second wife, you know, but I didn't fancy any of them. I hated to leave India, because I had an odd idea that I had inherited papa's disease and should die on the journey home to England, but then I could never have borne the idea of spending all my days out there. If I were to marry," and she drooped her face to hide imaginary blushes, "I should like to settle in England. There's no place like England."

"I am glad to hear you say that, my dear. And I am glad that you have brought home a whole heart. I am no match-maker, Nerea, but I would like to see you happily settled, with a husband who could appreciate you. With your beauty and wealth you can make a grand marriage. I said that I was no match-maker. But I am," and the baroness smiled. "I have a plan for your future which I hope to see realized."

"What is it, Aunt Folliott? Is it—is it about Sir Lionel Charlton," the impostor whispered.

Lady Folliott looked tenderly down upon the pretty face upon her knee, upon the heavy down-dropped eyelids—she had not yet noticed that the false Miss Ber-

myingham's eyes were generally downcast—and upon the fluffy red-gold hair.

“Yes, my dear,” she said—“yes, Nerea, darling. My plan concerns Sir Lionel Charlton.”

“Tell me about him. Is he handsome?”

“He is very handsome, and as good and noble as he is handsome. His age is the same as yours. He has his faults, I suppose ; we all have, unless you are an exception to the rule, dear, as you seem to be,” said the baroness, fondly, “but his faults spring from the very excess of virtues. He is brave, generous, kind. He inherited from his father the baronetcy, and a great estate which was encumbered with mortgages to two-thirds its value. For the first year or two after coming into his inheritance, Lionel was reckless and wild ; but I know, Nerea, that he never did one thing unbecoming a man of honor and a gentleman. His great fault consisted in spending money too freely, in giving right and left, in a too lavish generosity to persons who, finding his weakness, preyed upon it. But he has changed all that.”

“How, Aunt Folliott ? I hope he is not miserly.”

“Heaven forbid ! He could not be miserly. It is not in his nature. He has conquered his spendthrift weakness : but he is generous still. He has devoted himself to the care of his estate, and the larger part of his income from it is annually paid upon the mortgages. But it will take him ten years to free his property from encumbrance—ten years of toil and frugality. He has a very nice sense of honor. He has never loved, and has a chivalrous idea that he will never marry except for love. Now I own to you, Nerea, that I should like, above all things, to see you Sir Lionel Charlton's wife.”

“But he is not rich !” sighed the impostor.

“No, he is not rich now ; but when the debt is paid

off his estate, he will have an income of seven thousand a year. Of all women in the world, Nerea, you can afford to marry for love !”

“Yes, I know,” said the false Miss Bermyngham, “and if I like Sir Lionel Charlton, and if he likes me, you know—”

She paused in seeming girlish confusion.

“You will like him and he will like you, Nerea,” said Lady Folliott, with a smile. “There is no possibility that you will dislike each other. And I really think you ought to marry Sir Lionel for other reasons. In the first place, he is your distant relative upon your father’s side, and if you were to die unmarried and without a will he would inherit your wealth.”

The impostor started.

“Is it possible ?” she ejaculated. “I didn’t know—I had forgotten—”

“It is nevertheless true. Your mother was my sister, Nerea, and lived with me at Folliott Court a year or two after my marriage. While in my husband’s house, she became acquainted with my husband’s cousin, Miles Bermyngham, a fine young man of ample fortune, and of a business turn of mind. My sister fell in love with Miles Bermyngham, married him, and went with him to India, where you were born, and where your mother died. You are, therefore, my own niece, you see, and you are also the daughter of my husband’s cousin, which makes you a relative of the Folliotts. Sir Lionel Charlton is my late husband’s own nephew, and your relative, therefore, upon your father’s side.”

“I understand now,” said the usurper.

“I wonder your father never spoke to you of his cousin, who became, in due course of time, Lady Charlton, and mother of the present baronet,” said Lady Folliott. “She was Lady Clara Folliott, my

sister-in-law, and your father, her cousin, loved her devotedly. He was nearly heart-broken at her marriage with Sir William Charlton, yet he subsequently married my sister and was very happy. He once told me—it was during his visit to Folliott Court fifteen years ago—that he should like to live to see you Lionel Charlton's wife, and that if he should survive his wife and child, his property should all go to Lionel. He made a will to that effect, and it is recorded at Doctor's Commons."

This revelation nearly stunned the usurper. Sir Lionel Charlton was, then, the rightful owner of the dead Nerea Bermyngham's wealth! She had not given a thought before to the legitimate heir of the Bermyngham property. She had not even wondered whom it was she had defrauded.

"I remember hearing papa say something about his cousin, Lady Clara, when he was ill," said the girl, fearing lest she should betray herself by her agitation, and feeling that she ought to say something.

"I intend, if you marry Sir Lionel, to leave all that I possess to you both at my death," said Lady Folliott, gravely. "If you refuse to marry him, he shall have all. If he declines to marry you, you shall have all. My late husband's property descended to me, with the exception of a portion that was entailed, and I had money also in my own right. All this is at my absolute disposal, and I have told you what disposition I intend to make of it. I conceive that Sir Lionel has a claim upon me equal to that of my niece. But enough of business, my dear Nerea. You understand my wishes and hopes, and I trust you will try to gratify them."

"I will, indeed," the girl murmured, and she meant what she said. "I can promise you, dear Aunt Folliott,

that it will not be my fault if I am not Lady Charlton within a year."

And in the depth of her soul the false Miss Bermingham registered a vow that she would use every art to capture Sir Lionel Charlton, and that she would marry him and thus secure to herself beyond possibility of loss the fortune she had stolen.

The next morning Lady Folliott and the impostor, attended by their servants, set out for Folliott Court, in Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT FOLLIOTT COURT.

Folliott Court is one of the finest seats in Lincolnshire, comprising a large and productive estate, which, although situated within the marshy region known as the Fens, is well protected by dykes, thoroughly well drained, and very healthful.

Its half-dozen farms are noted for the native sheep of extraordinary size, the great short-horned cattle, and the London dray-horses of remarkable endurance, which throng their pastures.

The mansion of Folliott Court crowns a slight eminence, and possesses ample home grounds, which are to this day surrounded by a well-kept moat some twelve feet in width.

The grounds enclosed by this circular moat comprise thirty acres of gardens, shrubberies, grove, and terrace, in the centre of which, like a jewel in elaborate casket, stands the house.

In the rear of the mansion, at considerable distance

from it, the great clock-tower of the extensive stables rises from the midst of encircling trees and forms a prominent feature of the place.

The dwelling is ancient,—a vast pile of brick buildings with stone coping, with tall end towers, and a massive stone porch which might fitly form the entrance-way to a palace.

Folliott Court is renowned for its greenhouses, conservatories, its magnificent orangery and forcing-house, its pinery and graperies. All that wealth can buy or luxury desire seems to have been gathered within the circle formed by the old moat.

Outside the moat stretches the park which is of large extent, and the pastures and fields belonging to the manor.

The estate of Folliott Court, singularly enough, is freehold. The late Lord Folliott had inherited property in the north of England which had been strictly entailed, but this had come to him by will from his grandfather, and it had descended in the same manner in the family since its foundation, sometimes going to an older and sometimes to a favorite younger son. The late Lord Folliott, being childless, had bequeathed this estate to his beloved wife, and aunt of the real Miss Bermyngham, absolutely and unfettered by conditions, much of her own property having been employed to beautify and develop it.

Folliott Court then was a magnificent prize which its present owner, Lady Horatia Folliott had determined to bequeath to her husband's nephew and her own niece, should they marry with each other. In case they should not so marry, she was resolved to bestow it at her death upon that one of the young pair who should not decline the alliance.

As may be supposed, this glorious prize aroused all

the cupidity and greed in the nature of the false Miss Bermyngham. The wealth that she had usurped, great as it was, could not satisfy her now that she could see a possibility of adding another and larger fortune to it. As passions grow by what they feed on, so greed had now become the ruling passion of the impostor's being. She was determined to make the most of the opportunities that had fallen in her way ; to marry Sir Lionel Charlton, if he were willing ; to inherit Folliott Court in any event.

As the estate was freehold, and as Lady Folliott consequently could give it to whom she might desire, the usurper began to pay court to the baroness after the most assiduous fashion, to fawn upon and flatter her, but in that pretty, purring kitten-like way that seemed childlike, innocent, and the very perfection of artlessness.

It was the middle of the afternoon, or a little later, when Lady Folliott and the false Miss Bermyngham arrived at Spalding, and transferred themselves from the railway coach to the luxurious Folliott carriage, which, with liveried attendants, was in waiting.

The drive to Folliott Court, in the mild April afternoon, across the Lincolnshire fens, was very pleasant.

An hour's brisk drive brought the travelers to the hamlet of Folliott Fens, which consisted of a single street known as King Street, upon which were situated the village church ; the inn known as the Folliott Arms, the smithy, two or three shops, in one of which was the post-office, and a dozen houses, one of which was occupied by the rector, and another by a very excellent physician and surgeon.

The carriage passed swiftly through King Street, the shop-keepers rushing to their doors to witness the return of " my lady," and then were seen the houses set

in the midst of large gardens. Beyond the village the road was bordered on one side by the trees of Folliott Park, and upon the other by pastures and fields.

"The village of Folliott Fens, for the most part, belongs to my estate," said Lady Folliott, quietly. "This is my park, Nerea. It will be yours and Lionel's some day, I hope. We shall turn in here and finish our drive through our own grounds."

The carriage drew up before a tall bronze gate, formed of spears, the heads of which were tipped with shining brass, which opened directly into the park. One of the footmen alighted and opened this gate, and they entered the wide avenue, shaded by grand old oaks. Presently they turned into another avenue, and the impostor who was staring about her with eager eyes, beheld, in one bosky nook, a little temple of the Grecian order of architecture, in another, a marble statue of a dryad or wood-nymph, in others, rustic seats, airy pavilions, a charming little chalêt, and several fountains, one of which, like that at Chatsworth, was in the form of a willow tree, from every twig and branch of which the water sprang out in jets and spray.

The false Miss Bermyngham was in raptures over all this display of luxury and taste. As Lady Folliott had appointed the time of her return, the fountains were playing. There were shy-eyed deer in large numbers. Upon the pretty lake swans were sailing.

"It is like fairy-land!" said the impostor, drawing a long breath. "I never, never saw any place half so charming! Aunt Folliott, it is Paradise! It must have cost—oh, mints and mints of money!"

"Certainly more than one fortune has been expended upon it," said the baroness. "My own dowry was absorbed in beautifying and improving the estate, and it was for that reason that Lord Folliott bequeathed

Folliott Court to me absolutely. I conceive that my niece and his nephew have equal claims upon me, as I told you, my dear. I am glad, therefore, that you like the place. I hope that you will be mistress after I am gone," and she looked fondly upon the blonde and pretty face of the usurper.

"Is Sir Lionel Charlton at Folliott Court now?" inquired the false Miss Bermyngham.

"No, my dear. Folliott Court has always been his home more or less, but he has not been here for a month. His own place is in Herefordshire. He may be there at this time, or in town, or visiting some friend. He has promised to arrive here next week. I expected you to arrive at that time, my dear, and was anxious that he should be here to meet you. Now you see the towers of the Court, my dear. We are almost home now."

They crossed the handsome marble arch that spanned the moat, and passed along the winding drive, through shrubbery and gardens and lawn, coming to an abrupt halt in the carriage porch.

Lady Folliott alighted and gave her hand to the false Miss Bermyngham, who sprang out with a little child-like laugh.

"Home at last!" cried the impostor. "After these weeks of travel by sea and land, I have reached home at last!"

The house-door stood open wide, and Lady Folliott, with words of affection, led the girl within the mansion.

The usurper's usually downcast eyes shot forth a long, sweeping, sidelong glance, after their usual fashion.

She beheld a stately old baronial hall, hung with armor, deer's antlers, and trophies of the chase, the walls and floor of marble, the furniture of ancient man-

ufacture and exquisitely carved. The grand marble staircase opened from its especial hall, and a glimpse of it could be seen through the carved marble arches that partially screened it from view.

"We will go up stairs at once, my dear," said Lady Folliott. "Your room is ready, and your maid will be here directly. The servants followed us in a spring-cart with the luggage, you know. I will show you to your rooms, which are near my own."

The housekeeper was in waiting to receive her mistress, and Lady Folliott greeted her with kind courtesy, presented her to her guest, and then conducted the girl down the length of the stately hall, beyond the arches, and up the great staircase.

This stair was broad enough for six persons to march abreast upon it. There were very frequent wide landings, and these spaces were ornamented with living dwarf palms in great majolica vases. There were frequent niches also filled with gleaming statuary.

Clinging to Lady Folliott's arm, the false Miss Bermyngham ascended the stair to the upper hall, which was of similar size to that below. Magnificent Gothic windows twelve feet wide lighted this hall, one window being at each end, and each window being provided with a very extensive balcony outside.

Doors opened from either side of this vast hall, which was hung with pictures and suitably furnished.

"My rooms are upon the right, Nerea," said Lady Folliott, "and look out upon the gardens and the park. Your rooms are exactly opposite mine, and afford views of the lawn and shrubberies and the rose garden."

She opened a door at her left, and ushered the impostor into a beautiful parlor, daintily furnished, the prevailing color being pale blue. The walls were hung with fluted silk. The carpet was of blue and silver-

gray. The couches, the roomy easy-chairs, the hassocks, were all of blue silk, embroidered with silver. The doors were of palest blue also, and the panels were of porcelain, ornamented with painted clusters of exquisite pink roses.

"It is a perfect bower!" cried the usurper, taking in all these details with a glance, and noticing also the frescoed ceiling, the chandelier with its forest of wax-lights, and the silvered grate, in which a fire was burning. "And you have remembered that I came from India and love warmth as a cat does!" she continued. "I am a true fire-worshipper, dear Aunt Folliott."

"Rooms that have been long unused require thorough warmth and ventilation before being occupied," said the baroness. "These rooms have been warmed every day for a week, Nerea. Not a suspicion of chill remains in the walls. Let me show you your dressing-room and bed-chamber."

The dressing-room immediately adjoined the parlor, and was in keeping with it. The bedroom was perfect in its way, having a dark polished floor dotted about with white rugs; a low, white bed, with a canopy, from which fell a cloud of misty white drapery, and a couple of white easy-chairs.

The bath-room was large, and had a high raised platform, in which was a sunken marble bath. No luxury that art could devise was wanting here.

"And here is a closet for your maid, should you desire her to sleep near you," said Lady Folliott, opening the door of a small bedroom which was lighted by two windows. "And now, my dear, I will leave you to rest and to make your toilette. We dine at seven o'clock. I will come for you myself!"

She led the way back to the blue parlor, and kissing

the fair, false face of the impostor, withdrew to her own apartments.

The girl threw off her hat, gloves and shawl upon a sofa, and looked around her with exulting eyes.

"Ah! that was a happy inspiration of mine," she said to herself, "to exchange places with that dead girl. She has lost nothing by the exchange but a splendid funeral, but I have gained great wealth, powerful friends, a luxurious home, absolute safety, the prospect of marrying this Sir Lionel Charlton, and of inheriting this great estate! Was ever a lot more magnificent than this I have grasped? I have been bold; I must be cunning. I must play my new part well. I must never be off my guard. I wonder," and a sinister smile played around her red lips—"what my Lady Folliott would say if she knew that her niece is dead, and that I am an impostor with a terrible past, that I am a fugitive from justice, that this little hand"—and she held up one white and jewelled member against the red glow of the fire, and surveyed it critically—"has done deeds of crime! Ah! if she knew who and what is the dainty creature she has taken to her heart and home as her beloved niece, I verily believe she would die of sheer horror! I know that she would not sleep a wink with me under her roof!"

The pretty, blonde face, with that slow, sinister smile upon it, was thoroughly evil now in its expression. It was as if the girl had put off her mask of innocent seeming, and stood revealed in her real character, wicked, base, and unscrupulous. Her eyes, over which the heavy lids were usually drooped, were open now. No wonder the girl was wont to keep those strange eyes hidden through pretended modesty and shyness. No more absolute contrast to her childish face could be imagined. They were bold and black, hard, keen, and

malicious. A mocking-devil looked from those sinister eyes—a daring and malignant yet cowardly soul lurked within that slender girl's figure, and showed itself in her open glances.

She flung herself upon a sofa near the fire, and continued to gaze about her lazily, with appreciative glances.

"I never imagined luxury like this," she mused. "I shall live like a princess here. I shall make my lady fairly dote upon me. I shall make Sir Lionel Charlton actually worship me. I have found my sphere at last. As to dangers, I think, if any arise, I shall be able to cope with them. The real Miss Bermyngham is dead. Fisherwick, her counselor and business agent, is dead also. Her money is invested in English consols, and I know how to draw the income at my pleasure. Miss Bermyngham lived quite secluded in Calcutta after her father's death, not bestowing or receiving visits. I have nothing to fear; no exposure of my imposture is possible. I have only to practise her handwriting assiduously, and all will be well. I have her diaries and letters. She was fond of talking, and told me all about herself and her friends. Yes, I can play my part thoroughly."

A servant appeared at this point of her reflections bearing a salver, upon which was spread a light lunch, with a tiny silver pot of tea.

The false Miss Bermyngham partook of this refreshment leisurely, and had sent away the tray, when her maid entered her presence.

This attendant was a discreet-looking Frenchwoman of middle age, with a sallow skin, a very low forehead, and bushy black hair. She was almost noiseless in her movements, and was dressed in black, so that she moved about like a shadow. She was accomplished in all the arts of her trade, and was likely to prove invaluable.

able to her new mistress. She had, however, a habit of starting at every unexpected sound that aroused the impostor's suspicion that her past also held its secrets. This point her mistress had decided to investigate at the earliest opportunity.

"Well, Finette," said the false Miss Bermyngham, lazily, "is my luggage arrived?"

"Yes, my lady," responded the maid, flattering her mistress with a title. "At least, two of the new boxes—the ones you directed—came in the spring-cart with us. The remaining trunks will arrive in another conveyance—a big wagon. The two that came with me were just taken into your dressing-room. I stopped below in the servants' hall a few minutes, ma'amselle, to make the acquaintance of the maids."

"You are to sleep near me, Finette," said her mistress. "You will find your bed-closet on investigation. The first thing to be done is to lay out my dinner-dress. I am just out of mourning for my dear papa, and I will wear a lavender-colored silk with black trimmings—the *Pingat*, you know. And now leave me and don't come near me till six o'clock. I want to sleep."

The maid retired. But the false Miss Bermyngham did not sleep. She lay broad awake, staring into the fire, and exulting in her successes, and planning a future when, as Lady Charlton, she might possess all this grandeur for her own.

At six o'clock Finette returned, and her mistress arose, yawning, and entered her dressing-room.

"It is a grand place, this Folliott Court, my lady," said the Frenchwoman, admiringly. "I never saw such splendor before—never! There are thirty servants, ma'amselle. It is a palace!"

"It will all be mine some day!" said the impostor, coolly. "I shall crowd the Court with gay company

when I become mistress here ; I shall give balls to the county gentry, and set the fashions for this part of Lincolnshire. I shall never be contented with a quiet country life, as a Lady Bountiful to the poor, all that—never.”

Finette dressed her mistress with a Frenchwoman's taste, and long before the dinner-hour the false Miss Bermyngham was attired in a trained lavender silk robe, trimmed with innumerable ruffles, puffs, and plaitings, with here and there a slender line of black which gave tone to it. The basque was heart-shaped at the neck, and a double Elizabethan frill of point lace, made stiff with invisible wires, rose high around the girl's white throat. Her red-gold hair was dressed high in braids and waves and curls, and in her ears swung great yellow topazes which glowed like mimic suns.

She was waiting in her parlor when Lady Folliott, in a dinner dress of black velvet came for her. The bell had rung, and the two ladies descended together to the dining-hall, a spacious apartment, which was perfect in all its appointments.

They lingered an hour over their dinner, and Lady Folliott then conducted her guest to the drawing-room.

“I found a letter in waiting for me from Sir Lionel Charlton,” said the baroness, as they passed along the hall. “He will be with us in a day or two. He is prepared to like you, Nerea. It depends upon you to make him love you. But indeed I don't see how he can help falling in love with you at first sight,” she added, affectionately. “You are one of those loving, clinging little creatures that men adore. Come this way, darling. You shall read his letter for yourself, and tell me if you think you can love him.”

They passed into the drawing-room together, arm in arm.



CHAPTER XVI.

RESCUED.

The bold defiance of Beatrix Rohan, as she stood at bay, utterly amazed and appalled both Mr. Hillsley and Colonel Brand.

The former was horrified and shocked. He believed the girl to be mad. His sole anxiety now was to get her out of his house without arousing the neighborhood.

Colonel Brand was infuriated. Had it not been for the presence of Mr. Hillsley he could have siezed the spirited girl and throttled her. He felt for her in that moment a hatred that terrified him. He could not trust his voice to speak.

"Miss Rohan," said Mr. Hillsley, in a voice that actually trembled, but which was intended to be deprecating and soothing—a voice in which he would have addressed a mad-woman—"for heaven's sake, be calm, be reasonable! Don't excite yourself so terribly. No one will harm you. By heaven, Colonel, what are we to do?"

He looked helplessly at Colonel Brand.

That gentleman was equally perplexed.

It was plain that, if they ventured to approach Beatrix, she would execute her threat and shriek for help, crying out that appalling word—*Murder*. And

Colonel Brand was equally with his friend averse to attracting a crowd in the street or summoning a policeman. The colonel wiped the cold perspiration from his narrow retreating forehead, and arched his long, thin nose and chin convulsively like a nut-cracker in active operation.

Beatrix looked from one to the other of the two men with great burning eyes. Her fair face was pale and anxious, but not despairing.

"Mr. Hillsley," she said, addressing the trustee in a voice which she endeavored to render calm, "you were my father's honored and trusted friend. As such, I again appeal to you. My personal guardians have proven themselves false to the trust reposed in them. They are cruel and treacherous and unscrupulous. They have starved and imprisoned me. They are determined to force me into a marriage with their son. Again I beseech you to befriend and protect me—to assist me in my application to the courts for a new guardian."

Again Mr. Hillsley fixed his gaze upon Colonel Brand.

That gentleman had gained sufficient self-possession to enable him to speak calmly, yet with a great affectation of grief and anxiety.

"My dear child," he said, "why will you cherish this singular hallucination? Why will you wrong us so cruelly? My poor wife was the beloved sister of your father. He knew her thoroughly, and he entrusted to her his most precious possession, his daughter, knowing that that daughter would receive from her a mother's care and tenderness. Mr. Hillsley knows us well, and is not to be imposed upon by your wild accusations. My dear child, you break my heart," and Colonel Brand put his handkerchief to his eyes. "You are as dear to me and Selina as is our own son. Conquer this singular

mania of yours, my dear child, and let me take you back to my weeping Selina, your second mother, who will receive you with open arms !”

Beatrix replied to this by a look of scorn and contempt. Mr. Hillsley, intercepting that glance, could scarcely repress a groan. His rosy, Sybaritic face was pitiable in its expression of misery. Loving his ease as he did, hating all annoyance, trouble, and excitement, this scene was, to him, a martyrdom.

Pleased with the sounds of his own words, and with the impression they had made upon the trustee, Colonel Brand warmed to his work and continued :

“Yes, Beatrix, all shall be forgiven and forgotten, if you will go quietly with me to your poor, weeping Aunt Selina. We will cherish you most tenderly. If you have conceived an aversion to your cousin, he shall be sent away. Come, then, dear child, come home with me—”

He moved towards her with outstretched arms.

“Back !” cried Beatrix, sharply. “One step nearer Colonel Brand, and I’ll scream for help !”

Colonel Brand paused upon the instant.

“Mr. Hillsley,” said Beatrix, “you have not yet answered my last appeal. Have you no pity for the daughter of your old friend. Do you refuse to aid me in my terrible extremity ?”

The trustee looked his embarrassment.

“My dear Miss Rohan,” he said, “you are the ward of your aunt and uncle. I have known them many years, and cannot believe this evil you allege against them. I cannot assist you to bring scandal upon their honorable name nor to make of yourself a spectacle for the gaping crowds that throng the courts. Colonel and Mrs. Brand stand to you in the place of your deceased parents. You belong to them until you attain your

majority, and I cannot interfere between them and you any more than I could interfere between parents and child."

The girl's dusk-gray eyes dilated and shone like stars.

"Then you refuse to help me?" she demanded.

"I do utterly refuse to interfere in this matter."

The girl's eyes wandered to the thin dark face of Colonel Brand. It was now aglow with wicked exultation. His little black ferret-eyes looked like burning coals. Beatrix shivered with a sudden chill.

"Knowing all that I have told you," she said, "you persist in sending me back to persecution—to a certain death? For, so sure as I go back to that Belgian chateau with Colonel Brand, I shall be allowed to emerge from it only as his son's wife or in my coffin. Do you understand, Mr. Hillsley? These people mean to seize upon my fortune before I attain my majority, even if they have to murder me to obtain it."

Mr. Hillsley gave a little gasp of horror.

"Miss Rohan," he said, "you terrify me. Such hallucinations are frightful. I decline again and finally to interfere between you and your guardians. I believe them to be good and just. Colonel," and he turned abruptly to the hypocrite beside him, "I think, for your own safety and that of your wife, you should put this poor young lady under medical restraint."

"We could not do that," ejaculated the colonel. "We could not bear to give up the care of our poor girl to strangers."

"I must beg you to remove her from my house immediately, Colonel," said the trustee. "I cannot bear a prolongation of this scene. You should be off, if you mean to catch the train," and he glanced at the clock. "You have barely time to do so."

"You hear, Beatrix?" said Colonel Brand. "Mr.

Hillsley's trust in me is unimpaired. He declines to pay attention to your insane appeals. He sees that your mind is unbalanced. I will not reproach you, nor again endeavor to argue with you. But, scream as you will, I am going to take you back with me to the Chateau Valbeck, and we are going to start *now!*"

He moved toward her, his face terrible in its threatenings and the fixedness of his purpose.

Beatrix drew open the door and darted out like a flash.

Colonel Brand flew after her.

The hall-door was closed, but the key was in the lock. There was a moment's delay, but the door was pulled open at last, and Beatrix, in a panic, sped down the steps. Colonel Brand, who had caught up his hat in passing, was at her heels!

There was no time to spring into the waiting cab—there was no resource save to continue her mad flight—anywhere—anywhere—so that she might escape from her remorseless enemy.

The cabman who had brought her to Upper Berkeley Street, witnessing her flight, alighted and rung the bell of Mr. Hillsley's house, but the hall-porter could not answer his excited questionings, Mr. Hillsley declined to see him, and he mounted his box and drove away with the intention of calling at number four Wellesley Terrace, Bayswater, for the amount of his fare. It thus happened that no clue to the girl's refuge in London was placed in the hands of her enemies.

Beatrix sped on like a mad creature, turning corner after corner with wild precipitancy. Desperation lent her strength. Capture was death, or worse than death. Colonel Brand kept close to her, only a few feet of distance intervening between them. She was weak from a long course of starvation and great recent fatigues,

and but for her terrors, must have fallen after a flight of but a few rods. Colonel Brand was thin, sinewy and strong. He gained upon her with his long strides, nevertheless, the girl would not surrender.

The night was light and the street lamps burned brightly. The fugitive passed several pedestrians, one or two of whom made an attempt to stop her, but she eluded them and hurried onward, wild-eyed and panting, with a gathering despair and frenzy.

"Stop!" cried Colonel Brand, in a hissing voice, close at her back. "I have you now! By heaven! you shall pay for this! Once I get you back to the chateau——"

His claw-like hand grazed her shoulder.

With a shrill, wild scream, Beatrice sprang forward with renewed strength, and darted around a corner into Oxford Street.

Colonel Brand bounded after her with a curse.

Beatrice saw only a glare of lights, with flitting shadows, in the great thoroughfare. She could distinguish neither sight nor sound. It seemed as if she were in a horrible nightmare.

And then again came that claw-like clutch upon her shoulder.

And again Colonel Brand's voice hissed in her ears:

"Curse you—curse you! You shall pay for this! Now—now I have you!"

And the fierce talons grasped her in a vice-like clutch.

"Help! Help!" shrieked the girl in agony. "For the love of God, help!"

That wild appeal was not uttered in vain.

A young gentleman, who had witnessed the pursuit from the instant Beatrice had turned into Oxford Street, and who had halted when Colonel Brand had seized her, now sprang forward, crying out:

"Let go the lady, you scoundrel!"

Colonel Brand snarled like a tiger.

"Stand back!" he said. "She belongs to me!"

"Oh, help, help!" cried Beatrix, in a faint and dying voice. "In the name of God, help!"

The young gentleman believed the girl to have been pursued by some villainous scoundrel who had encountered her in the street and had chosen to insult her. Acting upon this hasty supposition, with all the impetuosity of a fiery and chivalrous spirit, he doubled his fist and very promptly assaulted Colonel Brand and knocked him down.

Beatrix stood, deathly white, panting for breath, utterly strengthless.

Colonel Brand sprang to his feet and hurled himself upon his assailant, at the same time calling for the police.

But the police did not respond to his outcry. His opponent received his attack very coolly, parried his blows, and planted his fist again in the colonel's face, hitting him squarely upon the forehead.

Colonel Brand fell to the ground as if shot.

The young gentleman having ascertained that his antagonist was stunned and senseless, turned his attention to Beatrix.

She was leaning against a door-frame in an almost fainting condition.

By this time a crowd had collected. The shops were for the most part closed, but the colored lights of a chemist's shop flared from a window in the next block. The young gentleman, leaving Colonel Brand to the mercies and ministrations of the crowd, drew the arm of Beatrix within his and hurried her down the street.

Before they had taken ten steps she had lost her con-

sciousness, and would have fallen but for his prompt support.

He gathered up her slight and wasted figure in his arms and crossed the street, hurrying to the chemist's shop, into which he carried her.

He explained that he had rescued the young lady from one who had insulted her, and Beatrice was borne into a little parlor behind the shop, where, through the influence of restoratives, she presently regained her consciousness.

Her first utterance was a low cry of affright, as she started up and stared around her.

But these were friendly faces that bent over her—the little chemist, who wore spectacles, and who possessed an honest, kindly face; the chemist's wife, a timid, frightened little woman; and the gentleman who had rescued her from her enemy.

The gaze of Beatrice lingered longest and most gratefully upon her preserver.

He was young, about twenty-three years of age, tall, active, and slenderly-built, with a face of extraordinary beauty.

His complexion was olive-tinted; his eyes were black and were at once frank, honest, deep, and kindly; his forehead was broad, high, and massive, and his head was covered with short, black, silky curls that lay in close rings. His face was smooth-shaven save for his luxuriant black mustache. His mouth was firm and well-shaped, capable of expressing a womanly sweetness and gentleness, or a man's sternest and haughtiest anger.

His face, whether studied as a whole, or feature by feature, was grand and noble and beautiful. It was a face indicative of a grand and chivalrous soul, of an ardent temperament, and of a well-principled mind.

Beatrice felt an instinctive trust in his goodness, but

this trust did not prevent her from sending a quick glance of alarm and inquiry around her.

"Fear nothing," said the young gentleman, gravely and respectfully. "You are quite safe here, madam. That scoundrel will not dare follow you here!"

"That he will not," said the chemist. "It would not be safe for him."

But Beatrix would not be reassured. She knew that Colonel Brand, being her guardian, had 'a legal right to take charge of her, and she struggled to her feet, wild and anxious.

"Oh, let me go : let me go !" she exclaimed. "He will come for me here ! And I am so weak. Will you not call a cab for me ? What is that noise ?" and she raised her head like a startled deer.

The young gentleman came nearer to her, grave and gentle, and said, reassuringly :

"I beg you to compose yourself, madam. You are quite safe here. I will defend you with my life, if necessary. I guarantee your safety, upon the honor of a gentleman. Permit me to introduce myself to you. I am Sir Lionel Charlton !"

CHAPTER XV.

A PROMISE OF BETTER DAYS.

The announcement of his name upon the part of her brave young rescuer was not followed by a declaration of that of our heroine. His face invited her confidence. His frank avowal of his identity showed him honorable. What Beatrix would have said in reply to him cannot be known, for some sudden sound amidst the roar of

passing vehicles in the street caught her attention. Again her head was lifted, like that of a startled deer, and into her dusk-gray eyes, their gaze fixed upon Sir Lionel Charlton, came a look of wild appeal.

"I—I think he's coming," she faltered. "He will find me here. I must go."

She took a tottering step toward the door and halted, catching hold of a chair for support.

"I beg you not to give way to your fears, madam," said Sir Lionel Charlton, a grave and reassuring expression upon his olive face. "The man who insulted you cannot yet have recovered his senses. He will not be himself again in half-an-hour."

Beatrice sat down in an easy-chair.

A ring at the shop-bell called away the chemist. Beatrice listened, white and breathless. No sounds of commotion came from the shop, and the girl presently became convinced that her enemy had not yet resumed his pursuit.

"I feel quite well now," she said, with a piteous attempt at a smile. "I am very grateful to you, sir, but I dare not stay here longer. I cannot conquer my nervous fears. I must go."

She arose again, with a firmer carriage, and gratefully thanked the chemist's wife for her kindness. Sir Lionel made no further effort to detain the girl, noting her anxieties, but opened the door into the shop. Beatrice passed in and he followed her.

The chemist was alone and on the point of returning to his patient. Beatrice paused a moment to thank him also for his ministrations and to take out her purse. The young baronet forestalled her, however, by laying a gold piece upon the counter, and he then conducted the girl into the street.

They halted outside for a moment in the shadow.

The little crowd that had gathered so recently around the prostrate form of Colonel Brand had disappeared. The enemy of Beatrix was nowhere to be seen. Cabs and carriages were moving up and down the street as usual, and pedestrians passed too and fro upon the sidewalks. In the general hurry, and amid the numbers of persons passing, Beatrix and her preserver were not likely to attract special attention, except from an enemy close at hand. Beatrix sent a quick look around her, half expecting to see Colonel Brand spring out from the nearest shadows.

With a shudder, the girl put out one hand and clung to her rescuer as to a rock of safety.

"Will you stop an empty cab for me?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

Sir Lionel caught sight of an empty four-wheeler cab at that moment, and signalled the driver, but the latter shook his head and drove on.

"We shall not soon be able to find an unengaged cab, I fear," said the young gentleman. "We may be compelled to wait here ten minutes or more. Let me take you back into the chemist's parlor, madam, while I look for a cab——"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Beatrix, with another swift glance around her. "I will walk on alone. I shall meet a cab perhaps. Let me pay you the money you gave the chemist for me, and thank you for your goodness——"

She made a movement to withdraw her hand from Sir Lionel's arm, but he placed his hand in a firm gentle clasp upon hers and held it fast.

Beatrix looked up at him in a quick alarm and met his gaze. The lights of the chemist's shop fell full upon his face as he now stood. His black eyes were full of kindness and pity. The expression of his grandly noble

face was one of grave gentleness ; his mouth wore a smile of infinite pity and sweetness, which had yet in it nothing effeminate. So might he have looked upon his own sister. Beatrice was reassured.

"You are not well enough to take care of yourself, madam," said Sir Lionel, respectfully. "I shall see you safe home. If you have reason to fear that your recent assailant will seek to find you again, you need a protector. And since you will not return to the chemist's parlor," he added, "and since we ought not to remain here in waiting for a cab that may not be found in half-an-hour, let me conduct you to a cab-stand, which is only a couple of blocks distant. Do you think you can walk so far?"

Beatrice replied in the affirmative, and, keeping a fast hold upon the little clinging hand upon his arm, Sir Lionel led the girl down the street.

Beatrice was surprised at her own confidence in this handsome stranger. How strange it all was ! Half-an-hour ago, she had been flying along this same street, pursued by her enemy, utterly friendless and desolate. Now she was clinging to the arm of the man who had rescued her, and it seemed to her that she had known Sir Lionel all her life. His air of gentle authority impressed her with a keen respect for him. His glances stirred her heart strangely. She felt a delicious sense of security in his protection that was very blissful after her recent terrors.

They reached the cab-stand in safety, the girl's strength increasing with exercise. Sir Lionel assisted his charge into the vehicle, and said to her in a low tone :

"Before giving your address to the cabman, madam, permit me to ask you a question. Does your assailant of to-night know where you live?"

"No, no !" said Beatrice. "Heaven forbid !"

"Is it possible that he would seek to learn your address?" continued the young baronet, gravely.

Beatrix uttered an agitated affirmative.

"Then it would be well to proceed from here in any direction save your home. We must throw that person off the scent, if he should make inquiries at this cabstand, which he would be likely to do. Will you tell me where you live?"

Beatrix gave her address in an almost inaudible tone.

The cabman was upon his box awaiting orders. Sir Lionel said to him, in a loud, clear voice :

"Regent Circus !" and then entered the cab and took his place opposite Beatrix.

The vehicle rolled rapidly down the street.

Sir Lionel was silent, and Beatrix wondered what could be his opinion of her. She felt that some explanation was due him after all his services to her, and she said in a faltering voice :

"Sir Lionel, I am oppressed with my sense of indebtedness to you. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness. I am a stranger in London—"

"I thought so," said the baronet, quietly, as she paused.

"I am an orphan," continued Beatrix, "and utterly friendless. I have lodgings in Bayswater, but I have no home upon this wide earth !"

The pathos of her voice went to Sir Lionel's chivalrous heart.

He had seen at a glance that she was a lady by birth and breeding. There was an air of culture about her that would have been apparent to the most ignorant. That patrician manner, that slightly haughty carriage of the proud young head, belonged to one who had held a commanding, rather than dependent, position. Those pure dusk-gray eyes, the pure Greek face, the childlike

mouth, the atmosphere of perfect refinement that hovered around her, all declared that she was more than worthy of his protection and his homage. And the reserve in her manner toward even her preserver but enhanced his high opinion of her.

"Have you no relatives, madam?" asked Sir Lionel. "It is strange for one to stand utterly alone."

Beatrice hesitated, and then said :

"I cannot tell you all my story, Sir Lionel, not even my true name. I am called Miss Trist here in London. The man from whom you rescued me is my relative by marriage and my remorseless enemy. I inherited a fortune from my father, which will revert to this person's wife at my death, if I should die before attaining my majority. And that is the secret of his persecutions."

Sir Lionel regarded the girl keenly in the swift flash of a street lamp. Her story was strange, but there was no madness in that proud, yet sorrowful young face, no wildness apparent in those sombre eyes. He was constrained to believe her explanation, improbable as it seemed.

"Has this person who assaulted you any claims upon you, Miss Trist?" he asked. "Has he any authority over you, I mean?"

"He is my guardian," was the answer.

"Are you not aware, Miss Trist," asked Sir Lionel, "that an unfaithful guardian can be deposed from his office by application to the proper courts?"

"He is my uncle," said Beatrice ; "that is, he married my aunt, my father's sister. He has an honorable reputation, and is supposed to be wealthy. If I complained against him I should be treated as a madwoman ! I called this evening upon one of the trustees of my property. This man was with him and I saw them

both. I told my story before my guardian to this trustee, and he coolly advised my uncle to place me under medical restraint! If I were to make application to the courts, I should be remanded to my guardian's care, and my fate would then be sealed?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," said Beatrix, desperately, "that my uncle and aunt are really poor while they seem to be rich, that they have endeavored to force me into a marriage with their son, and that if I do not marry my cousin they mean to effect my death!"

Before Sir Lionel could reply to this startling declaration the cab had stopped in Regent Circus.

The passengers alighted, dismissed the vehicle, and moved slowly down Regent Street towards Pall Mall. They had gone but a few yards when the young baronet espied an empty cab approaching them from the opposite direction. He signalled it and it drew up at the curbstone.

"Euston Square railway station," said the young baronet, assisting Beatrix into the vehicle.

They proceeded rapidly upon their new course.

"I suppose," said Beatrix, after a brief silence, "that, like my trustee, you deem me mad, Sir Lionel."

"By no means," returned the young baronet. "Your story is strange, Miss Trist, but it is impossible to doubt your declarations. The world is full of wickedness. The newspapers relate stranger stories than yours every day."

"I do not know why I have been so frank, Sir Lionel, but it seems to me that I have known you for years," said the girl, shyly. "I can do nothing in a contest with my guardian, you see. If I attempt to free myself from his authority he will place me 'under medical restraint.' Even my trustee will favor my guardian's

claims. But one thing remains for me to do. I shall hide myself until the year of my minority is passed, and then I shall have nothing to fear, and shall claim my rights."

"Your decision may be wise, Miss Trist," said Sir Lionel, thoughtfully. "I regret that I am not more competent to advise you—providing you would take the advice of one of whom you know so little. But a year in lodgings among strangers will be very unpleasant for you. It will be like a year in prison. You will see no society ; you will have no amusements ; every strange face will seem to you the face of a spy and an enemy. Your life will be one constant anxiety."

"I know it," said Beatrix, desolately. "But what can I do? Where can I go? I have been in school all my life. My enemies will look first of all for me at those schools. They will expect me to go there. I might seek out certain of my school-fellows, but what will they think of me if I come to them for protection? They may refuse to shelter me. They may send for my guardian and give me up to him. No, Sir Lionel, I must bear my year of concealment as best I may. It will be only a year."

The girl leaned back in the shadow wearily. Her future looked dark and dreary to her. She wondered at herself for having spoken so freely to the young baronet, but her nerves had been so unstrung by her evening's adventure, and he had been so kind and sympathizing, that she had told him her story as to a brother.

"It seems to me, Miss Trist," said the young gentleman, after a brief silence, "that you need a friend, some one who can advise you better than I can do—a friend of your own sex. If you will permit me to tell to another what you have told me, I can promise you the friendship and protection of a noble and generous lady, my

aunt, Lady Folliott, of Folliott Court, in Lincolnshire. I am going to visit her to-morrow. Have I your permission to enlist her sympathy and aid in your cause?"

The girl's heart gave a quick throb.

It seemed as if Sir Lionel Charlton were giving her a glimpse into Paradise. The friendship and protection of a lady of influence and high social position, a safe shelter in a remote country home, these would insure her absolute safety. Her enemies might search for her, but they would search in vain. They would never look for her at Folliott Court, in Lincolnshire.

"Sir Lionel, I think God has sent you to aid me," cried Beatrix. "If you can procure for me the protection of Lady Folliott, you will save my life."

"I will undertake to procure it. Lady Folliott will send her own maid to escort you to Folliott Court. I can safely promise this."

"But her ladyship will desire to know more about me," said Beatrix. "She will not take under her protection a young lady whose name she does not know. I must give you my entire confidence, Sir Lionel. The name of the man who assaulted me to-night, and from whom you rescued me—my guardian—is Colonel Brand. He was formerly an officer of the army. And my name," she added, tremulously, "is Beatrix Rohan."

"The name of Rohan is familiar to me," said the baronet. "Has your father been long deceased?"

"He died in my early childhood, and my mother did not long survive him. He was the Honorable George Rohan. My mother was a Miss Mary Harcourt, of Herefordshire—an orphan heiress whose parents died in India."

"Now I am able to recall where I have heard the name of Rohan," said Sir Lionel. "My mother's most intimate friend in her girlhood was Miss Harcourt, who

married a Mr. Rohan. I have heard my mother speak of her dear friend and school-fellow, and regret Mrs. Rohan's early death. It is singular that the children of those intimate friends should meet in this manner, is it not? I am from Herefordshire, Miss Rohan. In consideration of the friendship of our mothers, I shall claim to be considered your friend."

"I shall hasten to acknowledge your claim, Sir Lionel," said Beatrix, trying to speak lightly. "Heaven knows that I need a friend."

They had now reached the Euston Square station, and the cab stopped. The young pair alighted. When they had dismissed this cabman also, and had seen him depart, they entered another vehicle which was in waiting, and Sir Lionel gave the girl's address.

"I think we shall have thrown Colonel Brand completely off the scent," said Sir Lionel, as they were borne onward. "His first thought upon recovery will be to visit the cab-stand nearest the scene of our adventure this evening. He will trace you to Regent Circus, but there his quest will end. The cab we hired at that point might have belonged in the city, or at Notting Hill, or at the East End. Yet I deemed it prudent to make another change, as we have done."

Beatrix had recovered her courage and hopefulness long before they reached Wellesley Terrace, Bayswater. After all, all was not lost. She felt that Providence had sent to her aid the son of her mother's early friend, and she would be protected from her enemies.

When the cab came to a halt before Mrs. Punnet's house, Sir Lionel sprang out and assisted her to alight, and then said :

"I shall probably not leave for Lincolnshire until the day after to-morrow, Miss Rohan. Will you permit me

to call upon you in the morning, to learn if you are quite recovered from this evening's excitement?"

Beatrix granted the desired permission.

Sir Lionel accompanied her to the door of the house, and waited until she had entered. Then he returned to the cab, ordering the driver to convey him to "Gosford's Private Hotel, Piccadilly."

"I have met my fate," he said to himself, as he leaned back in the seat Beatrix had occupied. "I have kept my heart whole all these years to fall in love, at last, at first sight! How beautiful and spirited she is! How lovely and gentle! It is strange that I should have thus encountered the daughter of my mother's dearest friend! I know that Lady Folliott will offer her a home and love and protection. From this moment I am Miss Rohan's suitor. If she will accept me after knowing me better, I will try to make her future life so full of happiness that she will forget her past sorrows. And if she refuses to marry me, I will live and die unmarried!"

CHAPTER XVI.

APPREHENSIONS.

Her first evening at Folliott Court passed very agreeably to the false Miss Bermyngham. First of all, upon entering the drawing-room, she read the letter from Sir Lionel Charlton, which Lady Folliott had found waiting for her. It was brief, but couched in the most affectionate terms and contained but scanty reference to the India heiress, merely expressing a hope that she would arrive as expected and would prove a pleasant companion for the baroness.

"Sir Lionel does not intend to commit himself before seeing me," said the impostor, coolly. "Does he know, dear Aunt Folliott, of your plans for his happiness and mine?"

"Yes, Nerea," acknowledged her ladyship. "I told him, upon the occasion of his last visit to me, upon what terms he might secure the ownership of Folliott Court."

"And what did he say?" asked the usurper, eagerly.

Lady Folliott's noble face flushed slightly.

"He said," she answered, "that he would never marry for money! But he acknowledged that he had never loved any woman, and that if he found my niece all that I expected, and if he should conceive a liking for her and felt that she would be happy with him, he would offer himself as her suitor. Certainly, all that is reasonable. And as you are all I expected, my dear child, I know he will fall in love with you, as you will fall in love with him!"

"Is he a goody-goody sort of a young man, Aunt Folliott?" asked the girl, flinging herself upon a hassock at the feet of the baroness.

"By no means," said Lady Folliott, smiling. "He was formerly quite wild, as I told you. He was not fond of wine; he never cared for the usual follies of young men. He is pure in mind and in heart. But his wildness consisted in keeping race-horses, which he entered at Newmarket and elsewhere, and betting excessively. He lost money invariably. His horses always came in last at the races. His bets were always wrong. A year of that sufficed. His wild oats were soon sown. He cut loose from his betting associates, and went back to Herefordshire with the hope of retrieving his fortunes. But his predecessors had been wild too in their day, and that was a heavy encumbrance upon his patrimony, which he had greatly

increased. Under the circumstances, he did the best thing he could do. His farms were let to good tenants. He leased his home-manoir to a good farmer, reserving the house and park, which he let separately. He lives upon an income of four hundred pounds a year, but in ten years, at the rate he is now paying off his mortgages, Charlton Place will be free and unencumbered."

"If he has any pride in, or love for his ancestral home, he will fall in love with me immediately," said the girl, with an arch little laugh.

"Lionel is the soul of honor," said Lady Folliott. "He will make a good husband, Nerea, and he possesses a fiery, ardent temperament, vivid imagination, and a high sense of chivalry, so that once he becomes your lover he will remain your lover to the day of his death. His wife will be a happy woman!"

"And I shall be his wife!" said the impostor, confidently. "I know my power, Aunt Folliott, and I shall use it!"

Through her half-shut eyes, the false Miss Bermingham surveyed the apartment, experiencing a delightful sense of prospective ownership.

The drawing-room was sixty feet in length, and proportionately broad and high. It was furnished in the most exquisite taste, the prevailing hue of the upholstery being pale golden. There was a bay window of large size at one end. At the other, glazed doors opened into a conservatory filled with flowers in bloom. At one side of the room was an immense window, fifteen feet in width, and this was flanked on either side at a little distance by ordinary windows. The room, therefore, could be flooded with light at will, and the effect was to render it extraordinarily gay and pleasant.

"It would take my entire fortune to build a mansion like this and furnish it like this," thought the girl. "And

then I should have no money left to adorn the grounds. I will own this place and have my fortune besides. I will honestly try to win Sir Lionel Charlton, and I don't doubt but that I shall succeed in my efforts. But the refusal to enter into the alliance, if there be a refusal, shall come from him, and that will leave me prospective owner here, while it will leave him virtually poor. Oh I will be crafty. I'll be a perfect fox."

And the impostor smiled strangely.

Lady Folliott put Sir Lionel's letter in her pocket.

"I am very fond of music, Nerea," she said, changing the subject abruptly. "The piano is open. Will you not delight me with a little exhibition of your accomplishments?"

"Oh, certainly," said the usurper, rising. "I used to play to papa by the hour together in the evenings at our dear old home in Calcutta."

The girl hastened to the grand piano and executed several brilliant operatic pieces in faultless style. Then she wheeled about upon her piano-stool, expecting praise for her performance.

Lady Folliott had been lying back in her chair with half-closed eyes. She looked up however, as the music ceased, and said:

"That was very fine, my dear. You have an artist's touch. I knew you had great musical genius. Your poor papa was never tired of praising in his letters your acquirements in music. But I like best the simple Scotch ballads that touch the heart and linger in the memory. Give me *Annie Laurie*, dear, or *Comin' thro' the Rye*."

"I don't sing," said the false Miss Bermyngham, a slight confusion in her manner. "I have no voice."

Lady Folliott looked astonished.

"No voice!" she repeated, opening her eyes very

wide. "No voice, Nerea! Why, my dear, your papa wrote me that your rendering of *Annie Laurie* was exquisite. He said that your voice was your chief beauty."

If it had been possible for the false Miss Bermyngham to show an accession of color to her face through the skillful enameling covering her features, she would have shown it at that moment. She bit her red lips angrily, and a very unpleasant glitter appeared in her half-shut, sleepy-looking eyes.

Yet she commanded herself promptly, and replied in a voice that was quite undisturbed.

"That was ages and ages ago, Aunt Folliott—eighteen months at least. I used to be a perfect nightingale, and all that sort of thing. But after papa died," and the pretty blonde face grew mournful, "I lost my voice. I have never sung a note since."

Lady Folliott was all sympathy now.

"Forgive me, my dear child, if I have wounded you," she said, gently. "Perhaps your voice will return some day. We must consult a physician in regard to it. We will make an effort at least to win back this lost charm."

"I never want to sing again, Aunt Folliott, never!" cried the impostor. "It would bring back too vividly those happy days when—when papa—"

She buried her face in her hands, and her form shook as with an irrepressible agitation.

Lady Folliott was genuinely distressed. She approached the girl, and caressed her very tenderly, and begged her to be comforted. She whispered words of Christian hope and comfort. And as the false Miss Bermyngham grew calmer, the baroness entertained her with displays of rare engravings, of the cabinet of curiosities, of books and pictures, and the impostor permitted herself to be comforted, and was presently gay

and vivacious, and soft and purring, after her usual kitten-like fashion.

"Tell me something about your life out there in India, my dear," said Lady Folliott, delighted with the girl's returning smiles. "Tell me about our friends, the Devonports, the Craigies, and the Marstons."

The usurper replied by a very interesting account of life in India and answered all of Lady Folliott's inquiries with surprising accuracy and promptness.

Whoever she was, this gilded serpent in the nest of the dove, was well informed upon all the points upon which she was likely to be questioned.

Having satisfied the baroness upon all the points that interested her, the girl sauntered about the room, and finally paused at the great east window and looked out upon the gardens, with their statuary gleaming in the pale moonlight, upon the marble arch spanning the moat, and into the deep shadows of the park beyond.

She was exulting in the prospective ownership of this earthly paradise, when Lady Folliott's voice broke the enchanted stillness.

"My dear," said the baroness, "I have in store a little surprise for you. A very dear old friend of yours is coming to see you this evening, late as it is," and she glanced at the clock.

The impostor started.

She looked as if an abyss had opened before her.

"An old friend!" she repeated, in a strange, hard voice. "A—a person from India?"

"No, my dear," said Lady Folliott, smiling. "This friend of yours was never in India. You knew and loved her before you ever went to India. Think again, Nerea. What dear old friend of yours has been living at Folliott Fens all these years since you went away?"

A cold dew started upon the girl's forehead. In her

soul she uttered an anathema upon the baroness. She racked her brain for recollections of the real Miss Bermyngham's long confidences. Of whom had the true India heiress spoken oftenest on the long voyage home to England? Of Lady Folliott—of Sir Lionel Charlton—of——

A sudden relief flooded the impostor's being. A sudden glitter came from her downcast eyes.

"My nurse!" she exclaimed. "My dear old Annot! Is it my nurse, Aunt Folliott?"

"Yes, my dear," replied the baroness. "Old Annot has been living with her son at Folliott Fens during the past fifteen years. She has been at the Court very often to inquire about you, and I have given her all your affectionate little messages as you wrote them. She was here yesterday to inquire when you were expected, and again to-day, the housekeeper told me. She left a message for me to-day, begging permission to call and see you this evening, after you should be entirely rested; and directly after dinner I sent her word that she might come. Poor, affectionate old soul! she cannot wait until morning."

There was no joy in the impostor's face. Instead, a look of apprehension gathered there.

She had deceived Lady Folliott completely. The baroness had not the faintest suspicion that she was not the real Miss Bermyngham. Her familiarity with the family history, her pretty, affectionate ways, her ease in her new position, her intimate knowledge of family friends, would have completely deceived a person who might have had suspicions concerning her identity. How much more had they deceived the baroness, who had received her with open arms as her beloved niece without the shadow of a doubt that she was what she had seemed.

Even that one point upon which her apprehensions had all rested—the fact that her eyes were black, and those of Miss Bermyngham had been blue—had been gotten over without exciting Lady Folliott's suspicions.

But then, it must be acknowledged that the baroness had seen very little of her niece in the latter's childhood. The real Miss Bermyngham had made one or two visits to Folliott Court, notably one fifteen years since ; but she was in charge of her parents and nurse at those times ; and Lady Folliott had usually seen her but once a day, when she had been allowed to leave the nursery for the dining-room, appearing at the dessert.

It was not to be wondered at that the baroness should have forgotten the color of her eyes.

But this old Annot who had been Miss Bermyngham's nurse for eight years, who had loved and petted her, who had cradled her in her arms, who had taught her her prayers, who must have gazed times without numbers into the pale, inane blue eyes of the heiress, how would it be possible to deceive her ?

Would not the old woman detect the imposture at a glance ?

"You are silent, Nerea," said Lady Folliott. "I expected you would welcome old Annot with delight. Poor soul, she loves you better than she loves her own children, I feel assured."

"I shall be glad to see her," said the impostor, in a voice that was singularly dry and hard. "I—I—the thought of seeing her fairly overcomes me. When I saw her last I had my parents, and now—"

She averted her head, apparently to conceal the emotions awakened by her memories, but in reality to hide the look of malignity and fear that distorted her pretty blonde face.

"Tender heart !" said Lady Folliott, affectionately.

"You are poorly fitted by nature, my darling Nerea, to battle with the world. It is well for you that you have wealth and a luxurious home, and powerful friends to make your life bright and sunny. You would be as helpless, if you were poor and alone, as a canary-bird would be if driven forth into the winter's storm."

"I know it," sighed the girl. "I am only a tender little creature made to be petted, just like a canary-bird, Aunt Folliott. And I shall be quite contented with a gilded cage forever and ever. But about old Annot. Will she soon be here?"

"You are growing impatient, dear," smiled the baroness. "I dare say she is waiting in the servant's hall with her son. I will ring and have her sent to us. But first I must tell you to be prepared for a great change in Annot. Fifteen years have transformed you from a little child into a charming girl; but fifteen years have turned Annot into an old woman. She stoops, and her face is wrinkled, and she is grown half-blind—"

"*Oh!*" breathed the impostor involuntarily.

A load was lifted from her. A wild joy replaced her anxieties. "Half-blind!" Was ever such good fortune? Surely the Evil One whom she served was making her evil way straight for her!

Lady Folliott had paused at her interruption and was regarding her earnestly.

"What did you say, Nerea?" she questioned.

"I said '*Oh!*'" replied the girl, placing, however, a very different accent upon the exclamation. "I was so shocked—so surprised—so grieved! I had expected to find old Annot hale and vigorous still, although she must be seventy years old!"

The baroness accepted this explanation in good faith and rang the bell, ordering old Annot to be shown up to the drawing-room.

The girl awaited the coming of Miss Bermyngham's former nurse with apparent eagerness, yet with considerable inward trepidation. A new idea had come to her.

"What if there should be such a faculty as instinct?" she thought. "What if this purblind old woman should detect, in some mysterious way, that I am not her former nursling? that I am an impostor?"

CHAPTER XVII.

BEATRIX STILL IN TROUBLE.

Beatrix Rohan was seated in her own little crimson parlor in Mrs. Punnet's lodging-house, upon the morning subsequent to her adventure with Colonel Brand from which Sir Lionel Charlton had so successfully extricated her.

Her fire was burning, for the April day had in its crisp atmosphere the chill of March.

Her easy-chair was drawn up before the hearth. The *Times* newspaper lay upon her knees, but her thoughts were busy, not with political or social news, but with the problems of her own existence.

She believed herself perfectly safe from the discovery of her enemies, under Mrs. Punnet's roof. In the great wilderness of London she deemed herself as secure as she would have been in a South American forest. She had money enough to keep her in comfort, even in luxury, during the ensuing twelvemonth. She had only to wait for her twenty-first birthday, when she would be her own mistress, and when she would have nothing more to fear from the Brands.

But then life at Mrs. Punnet's would be dreary, lonely, solitary. The year would be, as Sir Lionel Charlton had said, like a year in prison. She thought of him, so beautiful, after a noble and manly type, so brave and chivalrous, and her pale cheeks flushed and a soft and tender light glowed in her dusk-gray eyes. She remembered his promise of calling upon her that morning, and also his promise to enlist in her behalf the friendship of his aunt, Lady Folliott, and it seemed to her that a home under the protection of his relative would be delightful.

She had made the best toilet at her command. She had made no purchases of clothing since her arrival in London, but her hand-bag had contained an ample supply of linen, and her dress was still very presentable.

"If Lady Folliott should invite me to Folliott Court," she thought, "I shall have to buy a suitable outfit, but there's time enough for that. I shall certainly not go out upon a shopping expedition this morning."

In the midst of her reflections, she was startled by a knock upon her door.

Thinking a servant was come to announce her expected visitor, Sir Lionel Charlton, she arose and hastened to the door.

Instead of beholding the housemaid, she found herself face to face with Mrs. Trevor, her *compagnon du voyage* from Antwerp.

"You didn't expect to see me, I know, Miss Trist," said Mrs. Trevor, in a high shrill voice, her round, red face beaming with pleasure. "I am delighted to see you, my dear, and to see you looking so much better too."

She shook hands cordially with the young girl, and

permitted Beatrix to lead her into the room and to the easy-chair before the hearth.

Mrs. Trevor was dressed with the same lack of tastefulness which had characterized her traveling costume. She wore upon this occasion a trained pearl-colored silk dress, profusely trimmed, a short, black velvet jacket, decorated with bands of ermine fur, and a hat of garnet velvet covered with canary-colored plumes. Her gloves of pale blue were too small for her pudgy hands and were split down the palms. Her boots were of heavy morocco that had been black originally, but were now of a rusty brown color.

Fat and ruddy, with small eyes, hanging cheeks, and thick lips, she was yet good-natured, pleasant and friendly, unmistakably a lady, despite her faults of costume and of personal appearance.

Beatrix expressed her pleasure at again meeting her traveling companion, and inquired after Mrs. Trevor's daughter, whose dangerous illness had called her mother in such haste to England.

"My daughter is very much better, thank you, Miss Trist," said Mrs. Trevor. "The medical man is quite sure now that she will recover. How pleasantly you are settled here. Do you like Mrs. Punnet, my dear? She thinks you perfection."

"I like Mrs. Punnet very much indeed," said Beatrix. "I am quite at home here already. Have you received any news from Brussels concerning your lost pocket-book, Mrs. Trevor?"

The lady looked uneasy and troubled.

"I may as well come to the point of my visit at once, Miss Trist," she observed kindly. "Your question concerning the lost pocket-book opens the way to what I have to tell you. I had a call this morning, not more than an hour and a-half since, at my daughter's house

in Kensington, from a person who sent up his card without any name upon it, but with simply the words written upon it : 'A gentleman from Brussels, on important business.' Odd, wasn't it ? I supposed, of course, that he was an agent of police, come to return my stolen pocket-book. So I went down to him at once."

"And he restored your lost pocket-book ?" questioned Beatrix, with an air of interest. "Is there any trouble about identification, Mrs. Trevor ? Do you want my testimony in the case ?"

"No, my dear, no," said Mrs. Trevor, hastily. "I went down to the drawing-room, as I said, and my visitor came forward to receive me. He was not a Belgian at all. He was an Englishman, a gentleman as one could see at a glance. He was tall and thin, with little beady, black eyes, a long black beard, a bald head, and a long, thin nose, which he kept working up and down in the oddest manner, so that it looked like some restless wild creature trying to escape from his face !"

Beatrix grew pale. She knew one person who answered to Mrs. Trevor's description, and that person was her terrible enemy, Colonel Brand.

"What did he want, Mrs. Trevor ?" she asked, her voice fluttering.

"I did not give him a chance to tell me at first," answered Mrs. Trevor, smiling. "I rushed up to him, you must know, thinking only of my pocket-book. 'Where is it ?' says I. 'Have you got it with you ? Is anything gone out of it ?' He drew back and says he : 'Are you speaking of your pocket-book, madam ?' Says I : 'Of what else ? I expect a police-agent to bring me my purse from Belgium. My pocket was picked at the railway-station at Brussels.' 'Do you take me for a police-agent, madam ?' says he, his face growing red. 'I am no police-agent. I am a gentleman.' 'Oh,' says I ;

‘you must excuse me, sir, but if you are not come to see me on account of the pocket-book, you must be mistaken in my identity. I don’t know any one in Brussels.’ ‘I am not mistaken, madam,’ says he; ‘you are Mrs. Trevor, lately of Antwerp. I am Colonel Brand, Colonel Tarcas Brand, formerly of Her Majesty’s army.’

Beatrix uttered a half-suppressed exclamation.

“You have heard the name before, Miss Trist, I see,” said Mrs. Trevor. “Colonel Brand looked like a gentleman, but I must say I disliked him at sight. He looked cruel, cunning, and treacherous. He told me that he had received my address from the chief of police at Brussels. He informed me that he is the father of that red-haired, yellow-faced young man who intruded into our parlor at the Hotel de Flandre at Brussels, and who made impertinent inquiries about you. I did not consider his relationship to that young man any advantage to him. However, he treated me politely, and said that his son had informed him of his call upon me, and that he, the colonel, not being satisfied with the result of that visit, had resolved to see me himself.”

Beatrix sat quite still. She could not ask any questions. A sense of coming trouble gathered in her soul. Her face grew paler; she held her breath in keen suspense.

Mrs. Trevor bestowed a sharp yet kindly glance upon her drooping face, and resumed her story.

“Perhaps you can guess what Colonel Brand wanted of me. He desired to make inquiries in regard to my traveling-companion, Miss Trist. He said that he had obtained a description of her appearance at the Brussels railway-station and at the Hotel de Flandre. He asked me if she were about twenty years of age, if her hair was of a tawny color, her eyes dark gray, her complexion clear and pale? I replied by demanding why he

wished to do this. He said that he already knew it, having questioned the waiters at the Hotel de Flandre, but he desired me to confirm their story. Then I told him that the description was accurate. He asked me if I could give him your address. I answered that I could do so, inasmuch as I had myself recommended certain lodgings to you. He grew very eager at that, and demanded your address. I flatly declined to give it."

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Beatrix.

Mrs. Trevor regarded the girl with an increasing uneasiness, but continued:

"Colonel Brand proceeded to tell me that he had reason to believe that my Miss Trist was his own niece, Miss Beatrix Rohan. He said that his niece was not perfectly sane; that, while she was not raving mad, she was yet afflicted with a monomania in regard to her relatives. She believed them to be her enemies. She had been kept under close surveillance, her aunt fearing that the young lady might do herself an injury, but she had escaped their loving vigilance, and had fled from them, throwing herself upon the cold mercies of the world. Colonel Brand put his handkerchief to his eyes, and seemed greatly affected. He pictured the distress of the loving aunt. He spoke of the perils besetting the path of the innocent girl who had never in all her life, before the hour of her flight, been alone in the streets. He referred me for the truth of his story to Mr. James Hillsley, Upper Berkeley Street. He exhibited so much grief, anxiety, and affliction for his niece, that I was greatly affected, and I—I—"

Beatrix shot a wild glance at her visitor.

"You gave him my address?" she questioned.

"Yes," admitted the lady reluctantly. "I thought I ought to do so. His story was straightforward. He showed the grief a parent might have shown in the

same circumstances. I remembered that you had told me nothing about yourself ; that there was a mystery about you ; and that you seemed apprehensive of pursuit. Your weakness, pallor, and fatigue seemed to confirm his story. He said that he should go for his friend, Mr. Hillsley, and a police officer, and that he should take you under his protection in the course of the day, in time to catch the tidal train for Dover."

"He did not come here with you, then !"

"No, no, indeed. My dear child, after I had told Colonel Brand your address, I noticed a look of exultation in his eyes, a sort of triumphant cunning, and my mind misgave me. I remembered your kindness to me, a total stranger. I remembered that I had seen nothing in your conduct that was not sane, thoughtful and proper. And I had betrayed you to a person whom even I, dull and unsuspecting as I am, could plainly see, in that moment of his triumph, was your enemy ! And so, my dear, as soon as the man had gotten himself out of the house, I ordered the carriage, dressed myself, and hurried here to tell you what I had done."

Beatrix expressed her warm gratitude.

"Is this Colonel Brand your uncle ?" asked Mrs. Trevor.

Beatrix replied in the affirmative.

"And your name is not Miss Trist, but Miss Rohan ?"

"Yes," admitted Beatrix. "I am that unhappy Beatrix Rohan for whom Colonel Brand is searching. He is my aunt's husband—my enemy !"

In a few brief passionate sentences, she told her story ; how she had spent nearly all her life at school until her nineteenth birthday ; how she had since spent a year in travel with her relatives, who were also her guardians : how her cousin Randall Brand had besought her to marry him and how she had refused ; how her relatives

had drugged her heavily and conveyed her to the Chateau Valbeck, where for a month she had been kept a close prisoner ; how she had escaped through the barred window of her chamber, and, after undergoing various perils and adventures, had reached Antwerp, Brussels, London.

Mrs. Trevor was a warm-hearted lady, and her indignation against the Brands was great, as she listened to the girl's account of their cruelties and persecutions.

"I wish I had not seen Colonel Brand this morning," she exclaimed, not a doubt of the girl's truthfulness obtruding upon her mind. "How could I have betrayed you? You mad! Then I am mad—everybody's mad! You were so nicely settled here, Miss T—Miss Rohan. You could have stayed here a whole year in safety. Now, thanks to my folly, you will have to leave here at once. Colonel Brand will come for you this afternoon. He knows your address, and he will not burden himself with the guardianship of your person until the hour approaches for departure by the train. You have some hours before you. Where can you go?"

Beatrice's thoughts reverted to Sir Lionel Charlton and to Folliott Court.

"I have no relatives besides the Blands, Mrs. Trevor," she said. "Mr. Hillsley, my trustee, has been imposed upon by Colonel Brand and believes me not more than half-sane. I cannot go to him. There is no one upon whom I have any claim."

"Have you money, my dear?"

"Enough to keep me for a year, madam."

"Then you can elude your enemies," said Mrs. Trevor, cheerfully. "If you were obliged to work for your living, you could readily be traced. People demand refer-

ences of governesses and teachers, and you could not offer these. But, as you are not threatened with poverty, let me give you a little advice which, silly as I have proved myself, you will do well to heed."

"I shall be very glad of your advice, Mrs. Trevor, very glad of it and grateful for it."

"Very good. My husband—he is dead now—was a Welsh gentleman by birth. His name was Owen Trevor. He was born at a little place called Penmawr, in Merionethshire, North Wales. My husband's elder brother, Mr. Llewellyn Trevor, is a gentleman farmer and inherited the family estate. He still resides at Penmawr. Now, my dear, I am quite of your opinion that you would fail in any suit-at-law against you guardian. I think with you that you would do best to remain in seclusion until you attain you majority, and then come forward boldly, and take possession of your fortune. Penmawr is the most secluded place in all the British kingdom. You would be safe there, and the Trevors would try to make you happy. I will give you a letter to them, recommending you to their friendly offices and you can go to Penmawr either now or a week or month hence, as you may choose."

"I should like the letter," said Beatrix. "It may be of great service to me."

"There are rough people in Merionethshire," said Mrs. Trevor; "but you will find kind hearts there, and you will be absolutely safe there from the pursuit of your enemies. Do not tell even Mrs. Punnet where you are going. If you will take a circuitous route, and spend a week by the way, you will completely throw your pursuers off your track. Have you writing-materials, my dear? I will write a letter immediately."

Beatrix was obliged to ring for the required articles, and Mrs. Trevor wrote a long letter, addressing it to

Mr. Llewellyn Trevor, and after submitting it to Beatrice she sealed it with her own seal, which hung from her watch-chain.

Beatrice put the letter in her pocket. Mrs. Trevor, having finished her errand, soon after took her leave.

As soon as she had departed, the girl sought a private interview with her landlady, paid her a month's rent, and announced her immediate departure.

"Will you send out for a cab for me, Mrs. Punnet?" she asked. "I hope to return to you at some future time, but I am obliged to leave London within the hour."

Mrs. Punnet had already been cautioned by Mrs. Trevor not to question her young lodger, and accordingly she did not. She sent out to order a cab, and Beatrice went up to her pretty little parlor to gather up her few effects.

"I dare not remain to see Sir Lionel Charlton," she thought. "Colonel Brand may arrive at any moment. I will leave a message for the baronet. Perhaps sometime I may see him again."

She took up her hand-bag, having put on her cloak and hat, and gave a last, long, wistful glance around the room. What a pleasant refuge it seemed! How secure she had felt within these walls! And now she must go forth again, a fugitive and a wanderer! Would she find a safe refuge elsewhere? Or must her life henceforth be one of constant flights and terrors?

She descended the stairs slowly to the drawing-room.

It was untenanted. She was about to pull the bell when the housemaid opened the door, announcing:

"The cab is waiting, Miss. And here's a young gentleman wishes to see you!"

With these words, the housemaid ushered Sir Lionel Charlton into the room.



CHAPTER XVIII.

BEFRIENDED AGAIN BY SIR LIONEL.

Beatrix advanced to meet her visitor with a quick, bright smile and a vivid blush, and extended her hand to him. Sir Lionel took her hand in his, and inquired if she were quite recovered from the effects of her previous night's adventure.

"I am quite well, thank you, Sir Lionel," said the young girl, the flush fading as swiftly as it had appeared upon her clear, pale face. "And you are well also?"

The young baronet gave a smiling affirmative.

If he had seemed handsome to Beatrix upon the previous evening, when her mind had been torn with anxieties and terrors, he looked more than handsome now in the broad daylight, when she had opportunity to survey him calmly. His lithe, graceful figure, his noble face, with its olive skin, his jet black eyes, his well-shaped head, covered over with close-curling rings of jet black hair, his fine mouth, shaded by a luxuriant mustache, his beardless chin, square and massive, indicating a manly, resolute, yet refined nature, all made up a picture to be admired and remembered.

"You are dressed to go out," said the young baronet, glancing at the girl's hat and cloak. "I fear, Miss Rohan, that my call is inopportune."



CATLIKE, SHE PAUSED TO LISTEN.—*See Page 197.*

"To the contrary," said Beatrix, "it is most opportune. Had you come a few minutes later, you would not have seen me. I am about to resume my flight, Sir Lionel, I told you last evening my history. You know who was the man from whom you rescued me. He—he has traced me to this house!"

"After all our precautions!" exclaimed the young baronet. "How can it be possible? Have not your fears misled you, Miss Rohan? Have you seen him to-day?"

"No," replied Beatrix. "He did not follow me home, Sir Lionel. We completely eluded his pursuit. But he has visited Mrs. Trevor this morning. Mrs. Trevor is the lady with whom I traveled from Antwerp and Brussels. She was robbed of her purse at the Brussels railway station, and so left her English address with the Brussels chief of police. Colonel Brand easily obtained her address, and called upon her this morning, and learned from her that I was at this house. She had no sooner told him where he could find me than she repented her confidence and came to me, warning me to fly. Colonel Brand, knowing where I am, will not burden himself with the care of me until this afternoon, but he will come for me with Mr. Hillsley and a police officer, and take me away in time to catch the tidal train for Dover. Such, at least," added the young girl, "is his intention."

"And you were about to go forth again in search of a secure refuge?" said the baronet. "You told me, did you not, Miss Rohan, that you had no friends in London?"

"I have no friends in London, nor elsewhere!" said Beatrix, in a tone whose desolateness went to Sir Lionel's heart. "I am without relatives other than the Brands. I was educated in schools. I know no one to

whom I can go—no one who will hide me from my enemies !”

“ You were about to leave this house. Had you no shelter in prospect ?”

“ Mrs. Trevor gave me the address of her brother-in-law in Wales, and desired me to go to him. She gave me a letter to him.”

“ But he might not choose to assume the responsibility of protecting you,” said Sir Lionel. “ He may be very unlike Mrs. Trevor. His home, even if he should welcome you to it, might not prove congenial nor pleasant.”

“ It is possible, but any safe shelter would be Heaven to me now.”

“ Miss Rohan,” said the young baronet, earnestly, “ your mother and mine were dear and intimate friends. You have a claim upon my protection. I can offer you a safe and pleasant home with my aunt, Lady Folliott, who will receive you gladly. I had intended to ask her to send for you, but I know her warm heart so well that I beg you to forego any delay, and to let me take you to her. She will receive you as a daughter !”

Beatrix hesitated.

“ At Folliott Court,” continued Sir Lionel, following up his advantage, “ you will find refined society, affectionate friends, and pleasant companionship. Lady Folliott will be delighted to receive you. She is fond of young people, and expects a niece to live with her, a young lady from India, who is possibly already at the court. Let me take you to my aunt, Miss Rohan. You will certainly be safe with her !”

Beatrix yielded to his persuasions.

“ I will go, Sir Lionel,” she said, “ if you are quite sure that she will not be displeased by my unannounced coming. I am in a desperate strait and——”

"I am quite sure, Miss Rohan," said the baronet, as she paused, his face beaming. "But you will not wish to travel by night, and it is now too late for the day-train. I think too that Colonel Brand, not finding you here, will search the railway-stations this evening. We must of course leave this house immediately. I cannot take you to a hotel for this day and evening. But I have an old friend at Notting Hill, who was for many years my tutor, and I shall take you to his wife and confide you to her care until morning. Then we will depart for Lincolnshire."

Beatrice expressed her sense of joy and relief in warm terms.

"It is quite possible that Colonel Brand may arrive at any moment," said Sir Lionel, somewhat anxiously. "We ought not to linger here, Miss Rohan."

Beatrice made a movement toward the door, with the idea of seeking her landlady, but at that juncture Mrs. Punnet made her appearance.

Beatrice hastened to make her adieux, and Sir Lionel then conducted her to the cab, giving the order :

"To London Bridge station. A half-crown extra if you catch the twelve o'clock express !"

The cab rattled noisily down the street.

"Mrs. Punnet will think we intend to leave London on the train I mentioned," said the young baronet, as they were hurried onwards, "and Colonel Brand, on hearing her statement, will think you are gone into the country. There will be no one to watch the stations to-morrow morning when we really and truly take our departure."

They arrived at London Bridge station in time for the train Sir Lionel had mentioned. Dismissing the cabman, the young baronet conducted Beatrice into the station. A train was upon the point of departure, but a

train had also just arrived, and a crowd of passengers were alighting upon the platform.

Mingling with the throng as if they also were just arrived, the young couple signalled a cab and entered it. Sir Lionel gave the address of his former tutor, and they departed rapidly upon their new course.

It became evident in the course of their journey, that they had not moved too soon in their effort to outwit Miss Rohan's enemy.

Notting Hill being in the neighborhood of Bayswater, Beatrice became somewhat nervous and uneasy, keeping a vigilant look-out from the windows, and fancying a dozen times, that she beheld Colonel Brand.

As they entered the Uxbridge Road, however, with the Kensington Gardens at their left hand, a cab passed them slowly, with three men seated in it.

Beatrice shrank back into the deepest shadows of her vehicle, white as death, and not daring to breathe.

For in those three men she recognized Colonel Brand, her pitiless enemy, Mr. Hillsley, her trustee, and a policeman in uniform !

In that swift devouring glance into the passing cab, she saw that Colonel Brand was smiling and exultant ! He looked like one who is marching to an assured and perfect triumph !

It was plain that he had not yet been to Wellesley Terrace, but that he was on his way thither !

Not until the cab had entirely passed them did Beatrice ventured to breathe. Then she turned her gaze upon Sir Lionel, her eager eyes glowing, her breath coming in frightened gasps.

"That was Colonel Brand !" she said. "And—a police-officer !"

"Colonel Brand little dreams that you are beyond his reach, Miss Rohan," said the baronet. "By the

time he has discovered your flight you will be safely hidden from his search."

Beatrix began to recover her courage. Her enemies had not seen her. She was still safe.

Long before the young couple had reached their destination, Beatrix had thrown off a great portion of her load of care. She had an instinctive trust in the young baronet; she knew that he would protect her, and she banished from her countenance every trace of anxiety and apprehension.

The cab stopped at last before a little red-brick box of a house in a quiet street, and Sir Lionel assisted the young lady to alight. Having dismissed the cabman, he pulled the garden-bell set in the gate-post of the tall, green board-fence.

"This is Gladiolus Villa, Miss Rohan," he said. "My former tutor, Mr. Clawson, and his wife live here with one servant. I often visit them and I believe the dear old people regard me as a son."

A servant appeared and opened the gate to them. Mr. Clawson was at home, it appeared upon inquiry, and Sir Lionel conducted Beatrix up the narrow walk, up the spotless stone steps, into a little lobby, and thence into a quaint, little, old-fashioned drawing-room.

The servant disappeared with a message from the young baronet to her master and mistress.

Almost immediately Mr. and Mrs. Clawson made their appearance, and welcomed Sir Lionel with effusion.

The ex-tutor was a venerable, gray-haired man, with a long gray beard falling upon his breast. His light-blue eyes were full of kindness. His face invited trust and confidence.

Mrs. Clawson was a delicate copy of her husband,

She was old and gray-haired, too, and the expression on her countenance was very like his. The two might have been taken for brother and sister. The sympathy between them, as with many elderly couples, had created in them a marvelous resemblance to each other.

The baronet introduced Beatrix to his old friends and she was made welcome.

"I am come to claim your hospitality for Miss Rohan until to-morrow morning, Mrs. Clawson," said Sir Lionel, frankly. "I am to escort Miss Rohan to Folliott Court to-morrow. Until we leave town, I desire to place her in your charge."

"Any friend of yours, Sir Lionel, is welcome here," replied Mrs. Clawson. "Let me take your hat, my dear."

She removed the girl's hat and cloak with her own wrinkled, tremulous hands, and took a seat very near to that of her young guest.

During the conversation that followed, Beatrix again told the story of her life to kind and sympathizing listeners.

"How little we know of the wickedness that is in the world!" sighed Mr. Clawson, who was an indefatigable student of books, but who knew very little indeed of human nature. "It seems incredible that men should possess such a greed of money. This poor young lady is hunted for her fortune by men whom this insatiable greed seems to have converted into demons. Strange! Terrible!"

"And by men who should make it their first duty in life to protect her!" said Mrs. Clawson. "They are her nearest relatives, you know. But she will be safe here until to-morrow, and afterwards she will be safe at Folliott Court."

The day passed swiftly and pleasantly. Beatrix

remained within doors, not daring to go out upon a shopping expedition. Sir Lionel Charlton spent the day and evening at Gladiolus Villa, and left at ten o'clock for his hotel.

During those hours of constant intercourse, the favorable impression made by each one of the young couple upon the other deepened into a keener appreciation—into an ardent admiration—into love.

The next morning, at an early hour, the young baronet arrived in a cab and Beatrix went away with him. They drove to the station, seeing no hostile face on their arrival there, and set out in the first-class compartment of a mail train for Lincolnshire.

"You will soon be at home, Miss Rohan!" said the baronet. "You will soon be among warm and true-hearted friends! Only a few hours of travel and you will be as completely lost to your enemies as if you were dead!"

Sir Lionel had forgotten the hopes and plans which Lady Folliott had formed concerning his future. He had forgotten that it was her chief aim in life to marry him to the rich India heiress. And he could not know that in taking the pure and lovely Beatrix to Folliott Court he was ensuring for her the deadly hatred of that serpent-like woman—the false Miss Bermyngham. It was well he could not read the future.



CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT CAME OF SIR LIONEL'S PROTECTION.

It was late in the afternoon when the fly containing Beatrix Rohan and Sir Lionel Charlton crossed the moat surrounding Folliott Court, rolled through the shrubberies, and drew up within the carriage-porch.

The young baronet assisted his charge to descend, discharged the flyman, and conducted Beatrix into the great marble-paved hall, the door swinging open as by magic to admit them.

The gray-haired hall-porter was discovered, however, in attendance. He greeted Sir Lionel respectfully, yet with evident warmth of affection.

"Is Lady Folliott at home, Clark?" inquired the young baronet.

"Yes, Sir Lionel. My lady just went up to her own rooms," was the answer.

Sir Lionel turned to the girl, who was clinging to his arm.

"Let me leave you in the drawing-room a few moments, Miss Rohan," he said, in a low voice. "My aunt is probably gone to dress for dinner. I will go up to her rooms, and bring her down to receive you."

He conducted Beatrix into the magnificent drawing-room and to a large gold-colored chair before a hearth upon which a sea-coal fire was growing.

"Lady Folliott is a true fire-worshipper, Miss Rohan," he said, smiling, as the girl's slim, dark figure sank among the gold-colored cushions. "She has fires in all the rooms at Folliott Court all the year round, excepting only in midsummer. It is a pleasant fancy, I think, in our damp climate. If you will excuse me for a few minutes, and will make yourself comfortable, I will go in search of my aunt."

He departed upon his errand.

Beatrix leaned back among the cushions, with vague apprehensions as to her reception at the hands of Lady Folliott, but with a delicious sense of warmth and comfort enwrapping her. The lights glowed softly through the tinted globes of the gasoliers. The perfume of flowers came through the open doors of the conservatory in the dim distance, and the girl's wandering gaze caught glimpses of gorgeous coloring, of crimson and scarlet blooms, of cool green palms, and of drooping vines. She basked in the heat of the fire, looked about her curiously and appreciatively, and waited.

Meanwhile, Sir Lionel Charlton, who had spent years of his life at Folliott Court and was like a son in the house, went up to Lady Folliott's boudoir and knocked boldly for admittance.

The baroness's own maid opened the door to him.

"Tell Lady Folliott that I am here," he said. "I would like to see her as soon as possible!"

He advanced into the boudoir, approaching the fire.

The maid vanished into the dressing-room.

Lady Folliott's boudoir was a bright and sumptuous chamber, with a dozen wax-lights burning in silver sconces, with drawn curtains and plentiful lounges and easy chairs, and with an air of delicious home-comfort, the result of a perfect artistic taste.

Sir Lionel did not sit down. In fact, he had scarcely

time to do so when the door of the dressing-room opened, and Lady Folliott, still in her morning costume, of black silk, came swiftly into his presence.

"Lion, my dear boy!" she exclaimed, rushing towards him and bestowing upon him a tender, motherly embrace, "I am delighted to see you! How well you are looking!"

The young baronet returned her embrace with a filial affection. He loved this stately Lady Folliott as if she were his own mother. Cold and haughty as she might be to others, proud and imperious as society found her, she was always sweet and gentle and tender to him.

"Sit down, Lion," said the baroness. "When did you leave Herefordshire?"

"On Monday," replied Sir Lionel. "I have been stopping since in London."

"I returned from town yesterday," said Lady Folliott. "I wish I had known you were there! You should have come up with us, Lion!"

"Have you guests?" asked the baronet, quickly.

"Miss Bermyngham—Nerea—is come!" said Lady Folliott, her face lighting with a brighter radiance. "She telegraphed me from London that she was at the Langham. Of course I went to her at once, and I brought her home with me yesterday. You will see her at dinner. She is very pretty, Lion; very pretty and very sweet, with the most innocent, childlike ways. She is soft and clinging—a creature to be petted and loved."

The baronet smiled at Lady Folliott's enthusiasm.

"I shall be glad to see Miss Bermyngham," he said; "but I have something that I wish to say to you first of all, Aunt Folliott, something of importance."

"Well, what is it, Lion?" inquired the baroness, seating herself close beside Sir Lionel and taking his hand in hers. "Do you need money? And have you made

up your mind at last to solicit a pecuniary favor of me? My dear boy, as I have told you a hundred times, my purse is open to you. I have urged you again and again to make use of my purse as if it were your own, but you have been dreadfully stiff-necked and obstinate in your independence; you know you have, Lion! Shall I give you a blank check?"

"No, Aunt Folliott, I am not prepared to resign my stiff-necked independence yet," declared the young gentleman. "With my simple habits, I find my income of four hundred a year more than sufficient for my wants. I do not want a pecuniary favor, but I ask your hospitality and kindness for a friend whom I have ventured to bring with me to Folliott Court."

"Any friend of yours is welcome here, Lion," said Lady Folliott. "Is your friend in the drawing-room?"

The young baronet replied in the affirmative.

"I will ring and order rooms to be prepared near yours," said the baroness. "I am very glad, my dear boy, that you have felt sufficiently at home here to bring a friend with you. A little gayety will, I think, please Nerea."

The baroness was about to ring and order certain rooms to be prepared for the occupancy of Sir Lionel's friend, when the young man detained her.

"Let me tell you the whole story first, Aunt Folliott!" he exclaimed. "I have much to explain to you. In the first place, the friend I have ventured to bring to Folliott Court—the friend for whom I solicit your kindness—is a young lady."

The baroness started back.

"A young lady!" she repeated.

"Yes, Aunt Folliott, the most beautiful young creature you ever saw," cried Sir Lionel, with enthusiasm.

"She is only twenty years of age, a perfect lady, as lovely, as pure, and as sweet as an angel. You have only to see her to love her—"

"Is this paragon an old friend of yours, Lionel?" asked Lady Folliott, somewhat coldly. "A month ago, when you were here, you said nothing about her. She must be a new acquaintance."

"I saw her for the first time in my life the day before yesterday," said the baronet. "It was in Oxford Street—in the evening. She was flying along the street, pursued by a man whom I had the pleasure of knocking senseless. I accompanied her to her lodgings. Yesterday morning I called upon her and found her upon the point of flight, her enemy having tracked her to her temporary home. She has no friends. She has no home. And so, Aunt Folliott, I have brought her to you—"

"An adventuress! A mere clever adventuress!" ejaculated Lady Folliott. "This creature has imposed upon you, Lion. I cannot receive her into my house. You must send her away at once. She is some bold and scheming woman who has taken a fancy to your handsome face, and who thinks you rich, and that it would be fine to become Lady Charlton!"

"Aunt Folliott, you are mistaken. She is a pure, noble, lovely girl, as beautiful as a vision. She is of gentle birth and great fortune. She is an orphan. I was sure that you would open your arms to her!"

"Lion, your simplicity is incredible! This woman is one of those adventuresses of whom we read every day in the newspapers. I refuse to see her. You must send her away at once—"

"Very well, Aunt Folliott," said Sir Lionel, arising, his handsome face darkening. "She shall go immediately, but I shall go with her! Unfortunately, presum-

ing that you would gladly welcome my friend into your house, I sent away the fly that brought us here. If you will, therefore, order a carriage to convey us to Spalding, I will not detain you longer."

He bowed courteously and moved towards the door.

Lady Folliott sprang after him, catching his arm.

"Lion, my dear boy," she exclaimed, "shall an adventuress come between you and me? Shall a woman whom you saw first only two nights since come between you and the aunt who has been to you a mother?"

"You must have a poor opinion of me to think me capable of bringing an adventuress to Folliott Court," said Sir Lionel, pausing, with his hand upon the door-knob. "You must consider me as incapable of judging character—"

"I think you are taken in by a pretty face, Lionel. The girl is artful and sly. Don't draw away, Lion. Don't go! Are you determined to leave the Court if I refuse to receive this girl?"

"Certainly," said the young baronet, his face growing grave and stern.

"Then I will offer a compromise," said Lady Folliott. "It is to oblige you, Lion, and not because I think the girl worthy our consideration; but if you will remain with me at the Court I will send your friend to my land-steward's house, and give directions that she shall be treated as an honored guest. Will that do, Lionel?"

"It will not do!" cried the baronet, sternly.

"But surely, Lionel, you would not have me introduce this waif and stray to my sweet Nerea—my innocent little niece?"

"I have remained here too long, Aunt Folliott," said Sir Lionel. "This young lady whom I brought here is no whit inferior to your niece, were your niece an angel! A lodging in the house of your land-steward is

not what I seek for my friend. I could have found her refuge elsewhere, but I was sure that you would give her tenderness, sympathy, loving care and protection. Pardon my mistake. I will go now—”

“Is the boy mad?” cried Lady Folliott, still clinging to him. “Will you throw me over, Lionel—your aunt, your second mother—for a woman of whom you know nothing?”

“There you mistake, Aunt Folliott. This young lady is the daughter of my mother’s dearest school-friend, Miss Mary Harcourt, who married the Honorable George Rohan, Herefordshire, the cadet of a noble family. It is Miss Beatrice Rohan for whom I solicited your hospitality. She is an orphan, as I said, and has no relatives living—at least none near enough to be interested in her—with the exception of the family of Colonel Brand. The wife of Colonel Brand is her aunt, the sister of her late father. This aunt is her natural heir should she die before attaining her majority, and the Brands therefore have persecuted her most cruelly, endeavoring to force her into a marriage with their son, her cousin, or else into her grave!”

“Are you quite sure of this Lion? It sounds like the story of a madwoman.”

“I am quite sure, Aunt Folliott. Miss Rohan is as sane as you or I, although Colonel Brand would like to have people think her mad. She has been cruelly persecuted. If you would see her, all your prejudices would melt away like snow in the sunlight.”

Lady Folliott looked keenly at the baronet.

“You are greatly interested in her, Lion,” she said. “It is natural, perhaps, since you have discovered that her mother was your mother’s dearest friend. I am older than you, and it is equally natural that I should shrink from making acquaintances except in the regu-

lar manner. I will go down and see Miss Rohan, Lionel."

A smile of rare brightness and sweetness gathered about Sir Lionel's mouth. He knew all that was comprehended in this concession ; he knew that Lady Folliott had resolved to befriend Beatrix. He put his arm around the lady's waist and kissed her cheeks.

"I thought I could depend upon your good heart, dear Aunt Folliott," he said. "And now come with me to the drawing-room. Miss Rohan will wonder what keeps us so long."

"One word more, Lion," said the baroness. "You know the hopes I have formed for your future and that of Nerea. My niece is well worthy of your love. She is rich in her own right. She is prepared to like you. If you marry her, you shall inherit all that I possess. You know it is the dream of my life to have you and Nerea become husband and wife."

"Yes, I know, but—"

Lady Folliott interrupted him.

"Folliott Court, as you know, belonged to your uncle," she said, "and you, therefore, had a claim to inherit it. But my large fortune was all spent upon it, and Lord Folliott, in love and justice, bequeathed it to me. My sweet niece is as dear to me as a daughter. She thinks Folliott Court a Paradise. Now, Lion, although my niece is rich, yet I conceive that she has claims upon me. So, also, have you. I cannot divide this great estate between you, so I shall bequeath it to you both if you marry each other, or to that one of you who does not decline such alliance. Pardon me for repeating what I have said to you before, Lion, and don't fall in love with Miss Rohan," she added with assumed playfulness, yet with deep meaning. "And now that I have warned you, let us go down."

The young baronet would have made some response, but Lady Folliott rung her bell, and ordered rooms to be prepared for her guests. Then she passed out into the hall. He followed her, and they descended to the drawing-room.

At their entrance, Beatrix arose, and Sir Lionel presented her to the baroness.

Lady Folliott was surprised at the girl's grace and loveliness, at her air of thorough good-breeding, her exquisitely refined manners, her gentleness, yet her evident spirit. She could not but acknowledge to herself that the pink-and-white prettiness her niece compared with this girl's pure Greek beauty as a wax-light compares with a star. The childish, painted face of the false Miss Bermyngham would never elicit a second glance when Beatrix Rohan should be near. The down-cast black eyes of the impostor, half-hidden by her heavy lids, would seem veiled and furtive before the pure, frank, open eyes of dusk gray, which now gazed upon the face of Lady Folliott in such earnest appealing.

The baroness could not resist that gaze. She was warm-hearted and impulsive, quick to love and quick to hate. And so, although she had meant to be very formal with the young stranger, she bent down and kissed her and bade her welcome in her kindest, heartiest manner.

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes.

"Sir Lionel has told me all about you, Miss Rohan," said Lady Folliott. "You will be quite safe here, my dear. We will discuss your history at our leisure; but, in any or all events, whether we can free you legally from the guardianship of your unworthy relatives or otherwise, I promise you my protection. You shall not be sent back to the care of the Brands."

"I feel as if I were hidden from all pursuit here, madam," said Beatrix, her low, sweet voice quivering. "You are very kind to me, and I am very grateful. Surely, it was God who sent Sir Lionel Charlton to rescue me that night in Oxford Street."

Lady Folliott bent and kissed the girl again to hide her own sudden emotion.

"Let me show you up to your own room, Miss Rohan," she said. "You will have barely time to prepare for dinner. We dine at seven."

"I have only the clothes I wear, madam," said Beatrix, blushing.

"We will remedy that to-morrow," said Lady Folliott, with a smile. "In these days a complete wardrobe is soon supplied."

"There is one thing more to be said, Aunt Folliott," said Sir Lionel. "Miss Rohan does not wish to be called by her own name here. She knows that Colonel Brand will not leave a stone unturned in his search for her. He will set detectives at work to look for her. He has already learned without doubt from her landlady at Wellesley Terrace, that I called upon Miss Rohan, and that she departed with me. He may choose to look for me in Herefordshire and also here, in order to make inquiries of me concerning her. If he should then learn that a Miss Rohan is at Folliott Court—"

"I see, Lionel," interrupted the baroness. "Miss Rohan must forgo her own identity here, and be known as Miss Clare, my own young relative. No one at the Court shall be told your true name and history, excepting Nerea, Miss Bermyngham, my own niece. Now that is settled, Miss Clare, let me show you up to your room. Lion, your chamber is ready. A servant will show you to it."

But Sir Lionel declined the proffered guide and

departed to the room he always occupied at the Court. Lady Folliott, with a slower step, conducted Beatrice up the great staircase to the grand upper hall and to a suite of rooms nearly opposite her own.

These rooms were stately in size and furnishing, with picture-hung walls and frescoed ceilings—rooms fit for a princess. The sliding-doors connecting the various chambers of the suite were all open, and a vista of glowing wax-lights, ruddy fires and luxurious easy-chairs was spread before the tired young fugitive.

"I will send my own maid to you directly, my dear," said Lady Folliott, "and I will come for you myself in time for dinner."

She kissed Beatrice and withdrew.

"An extraordinarily beautiful girl," thought the baroness, as she went to her own apartments. "And as lovely as she is beautiful! Lion is right. She is pure and noble and good. Yet I could wish that Lion had not seen her. Pretty as Nerea is, this Beatrice will far outshine her. It is very unfortunate. But after all, everything may come out right yet. I may be able to force things into the right channels. I may be able to bring about this match upon which I have set my heart! I know that I shall bring it about," she added, more resolutely. "I never fail in anything I undertake—I shall not fail in this!"



CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER ENEMY.

Beatrix had not been in her boudoir many minutes when a servant entered, bringing upon a small salver a tiny silver-pot of tea and other light refreshment. The young lady drank a cup of the refreshing beverage, and then made certain improvements in her toilet, brushing her hair and dress, and putting little frills of lace about her neck and wrists. She had made these trifling changes in her appearance and was all ready for dinner when Lady Folliott's maid came in to attend her. Beatrix declined her services, and sat down to wait for the appearance of her hostess.

Lady Folliott appeared at five minutes to seven, in a dinner robe of black silk, with a tea-rose in her corsage, her gray hair put away from her fair face in thick puffs, her countenance beaming with kindness and hospitality.

Beatrix looked down involuntarily at her own costume.

"To-morrow," said the baroness, with a smile, "we shall indulge in that greatest delight of women, my dear, the ordering of a lady's complete outfit. We are quite alone this evening, so your dress won't matter. You will see only Sir Lionel, myself, and my niece, who

has but just arrived from India, and who is the dearest, sweetest, loveliest, little creature on earth ! I want you and Nerea to love each other. My little niece is used to solitude, and has had but few intimate friends. Her father died in India but little over a year ago, and Nerea conceived a fanciful notion that she had inherited his heart-disease, and so shut herself up, refusing to see much company. She needs a friend of her own age, and I hope you will be that friend. She is twenty-three years of age ; you are twenty. You two must have many tastes in common."

Beatrix was warm-hearted, and, like her hostess, quick to conceive likings and aversions, but she was not one to promise her friendship lightly to a person whom she had never seen, and without knowing what basis that friendship would have to rest upon ; so she bowed gravely, and only expressed a hope that Miss Bermingham and she would become friends.

" You cannot help loving Nerea," said Lady Folliott. " It is the desire of my life," she added, a little hesitatingly, that Nerea, who is my own sister's daughter, and Sir Lionel Charlton, who is my late husband's nephew, may love each other and become husband and wife. Their marriage would make me perfectly happy, and it would secure to them both this estate of Folliott Court. But come, my dear. We must go down."

She did not notice the swift pallor that overspread the fair, sweet face of Beatrix, nor the startled look that appeared in the sweet, dusk-gray eyes. The next moment the girl was herself again, calm as a summer's morning, serene and self-possessed.

They descended to the drawing-room together.

Sir Lionel was awaiting them and came forward to meet them.

As Beatrix met the tender inquiry of his black eyes,

a sudden vivid stain of scarlet replaced the pallor of her cheeks.

"I fancied that Nerea would be waiting for us," said Lady Folliott, with a glance about the drawing-room. "Ah, but here she comes!" and her face lighted up with smiles.

The tap of tiny boot-heels was heard upon the marble pavement of the hall, then the door which was ajar was pushed open and the false Miss Bermyngham entered the drawing-room.

The impostor had been informed of the arrival of Sir Lionel Charlton, and had accordingly attired herself with more than usual care.

Her complexion of pink and white was positively dazzling. Her mouth was red like moist coral. Her rich red-gold hair, of that peculiar shade produced upon dark hair by the assiduous use of bleaching liquids but which is now and then found so colored by the hand of nature, was arranged in puffs and braids and curls, high above her narrow forehead.

Gotten up in the most perfect manner, by the most skillful appliances of art, the false Miss Bermyngham looked to be in truth what she seemed, a blonde of rare and dainty type. No one would have suspected that the arts of skin-enameler and hair-dyer had been employed to make her what she seemed; that the use of belladonna and various pigments had darkened her eyelashes and eyebrows, and made her half-hidden eyes seem brighter.

She wore in her ears great, swinging, yellow topazes. Her dress of pale blue silk, trimmed with innumerable plaitings and flounces, fell behind her in a long and billowy train. Her neck was half-uncovered, and a topaz necklace with diamond pendant was displayed upon her fair skin.

She came forward with a delicious affectation of shyness, and looked from Lady Folliott to Sir Lionel Charlton with a strange, side-long glance.

"Nerea, my darling," said Lady Folliott, her voice full of pride and tenderness for the gilded serpent in the guise of her dead niece, "this young lady is Miss Clare. I hope you will love each other. Miss Clare, my niece—Miss Bermyngham."

The impostor shot a keen, sharp glance at Beatrix, and drew her breath hard. One look at the young stranger's face with its rare and exquisite beauty, filled her small soul with bitterest envy. She saw that Beatrix was the glorious diamond without flaw, while she knew herself to be but as glittering paste.

The conviction that she was in every way inferior to this simply-attired stranger was enough to make the false Miss Bermyngham hate Beatrix.

From that moment of their meeting, she was Beatrix's most relentless enemy !

Yet she smiled and extended her hand, and murmured an expression of delight at making "Miss Clare's" acquaintance.

"Nerea, love," said Lady Folliott, "allow me to present to you my late husband's nephew, Sir Lionel Charlton."

The impostor made a low and graceful bow to the young baronet, and stole a look at him.

Her heart gave a great leap as she noted the manly beauty of his dark and noble face.

"The handsomest man I ever saw in my life !" she said to herself. "I shall marry him—I swear it !"

Yet she seemed to shrink a little nearer to Lady Folliott in shy, maidenly embarrassment, as she expressed her pleasure at seeing Sir Lionel Charlton, of whom she "had heard so much."

Before the baronet could reply, the butler announced that dinner waited.

"Lion," said Lady Folliott, "give your arm to Nerea, and lead the way. Miss Clare, permit me to take you under my own wing."

They proceeded to the dining-hall, where an hour was passed, and they then returned to the drawing-room. The false Miss Bermyngham entertained her companions with brilliant opera music, and Beatrix was called upon to contribute her share to the entertainment. She played, without hesitation, a strange and wonderful bit of Italian composition, which was full of weird and beautiful effects, and then gave an English song, accompanying the piano with an exquisite contralto voice, low and sweet and tender—a voice that might have belonged to an angel.

Lady Folliott wiped the tears from her eyes and warmly complimented Beatrix. Sir Lionel's countenance declared his keen appreciation of the music, and he was not backward in expressing his pleasure in words.

"You ought to go upon the stage, Miss Clare," said the false Miss Bermyngham, unable to conceal her spiteful envy. "I am sure you would make a success. But perhaps you have already been upon the stage?" she added, inquiringly.

"No, I know nothing about the stage, Miss Bermyngham," replied Beatrix, quietly, although her color heightened. "I left school only a year ago, and have since employed my time in traveling."

"My little niece intended a compliment I am sure," said Lady Folliott. "She has probably never heard a voice like yours off the stage, Miss Clare. Certainly, your voice has been exquisitely cultivated. I wish that Nerea could sing as you do."

The gentle reproof conveyed in the baroness's words

and tone put the impostor upon her guard. She declared that she admired Beatrix's singing beyond all things else, and was cloyingly sweet and soft and purring throughout the remainder of the evening.

After Sir Lionel Charlton and Beatrix had retired to their several chambers that night, Lady Folliott entered the apartments of her pretended niece.

The false Miss Bermyngham was in her warmed and perfumed dressing-room. Her curtains were drawn, and a dozen wax-lights burned upon her dressing-table. She had laid aside her dinner dress and ornaments and was wrapped in a dressing gown of pale blue cashmere trimmed with swan's down. She was reclining in an easy-chair, and her maid, Finette, was brushing out her long red-gold hair. A regiment of bottles was upon the dressing-table, and as Lady Folliott entered Finette dexterously swept them aside into a large coffer arranged for their reception and dropped the lid upon them.

"Did you not bid me enter?" asked the baroness. "I knocked, and thought I heard a response. I am come in for a little talk with you, my dear. Send Finette away for half-an-hour, and we will visit together."

Lady Folliott was smiling and pleasant, as the impostor immediately perceived, yet it was not with the best grace in the world that the false Miss Bermyngham bade Finette retire for half-an-hour, and prepared to listen to the baroness.

"I suppose you are come to reprove me for my little jealousy of Miss Clare to-night, Aunt Folliott," said the girl, placing a chair for her visitor. "I know that I behaved shamefully, and I am very sorry," and she affected a pretty penitence. "I suppose you despise me, Aunt Folliott, and it was all because I love you so dearly and I want you to love me, and—and—" and her

head drooped, "I like Sir Lionel too, and I thought he admired Miss Clare—and I was just miserable."

"My dear child—"

"I shall just hate her if she wins your love away from me!" cried the little hypocrite, with assumed passion. "You are all I have in the world, Aunt Folliott, and no one shall take you from me!"

"My dear, innocent little Nerea!" exclaimed Lady Folliott, secretly pleased with this exhibition of seeming childish jealousy and affection. "What a child you are. No one, not even Miss Clare, or Lion himself, can come between you and me. Now tell me, how do you like Sir Lionel?"

The girl's eyes drooped.

"I—I could find it easy to love him!" she whispered.

"I am glad to hear that. I could see that Lion admired you, Nerea. But you must be more guarded in the future. Do not show so plainly your secret feelings, my little artless niece. You must be friends with Miss Clare. She is a lovely girl, and I like and admire her. I am come here to-night, my darling, to tell you her history, and to enlist your friendship for her. Her real name is not Miss Clare, but it is Beatrix Rohan."

"But why does she have an assumed name?" questioned the false Miss Bermyngham, with the utmost seeming simplicity. "Isn't that very wicked, Aunt Folliott, to go about under a false name? Isn't it against the laws, you know? And don't they put people in prison for it?"

"My little innocent darling," again breathed Lady Folliott, caressing the impostor, tenderly. "How little you know of the world. Miss Rohan is hiding from very cruel enemies, who have even sought her life. Lion, brought her to me, and I bade her call herself by my own maiden name, Miss Clare. She has known a

great deal of trouble for one so young, and we must be very good and affectionate to her."

Sir Lionel had found opportunity in the course of the evening to give Lady Folliott the details of Beatrice's history, and the baroness rehearsed these now to her pretended niece.

"What a romantic story!" said the impostor, when the lady had concluded. "Why, Miss Rohan is a perfect heroine! I shall love her dearly Aunt Folliott—I know I shall!"

She covered the face of the baroness with kisses, and when, a little later, Lady Folliott withdrew, it was with the conviction that her niece was the most affectionate, guileless, child-like creature in the united kingdom.

She might have changed her opinion if she could have seen the false Miss Bermyngham after the door had closed upon her.

The impostor's black eyes flew open wide and an ugly, wicked light leaped into them, and she shook her little clenched fist viciously in the direction taken by the baroness, and said, in a hissing whisper:

"Stupid old owl! Miserable old idiot! Sir Lionel will fall in love with this fugitive heiress under your very nose, if I don't prevent it! But I will prevent it! I know the girl's whole history, excepting only the address of Colonel Brand! I'll find that out and write to him! I'll tell him that the girl is here! We'll see—oh, we'll see who will win in this battle, my dear Miss Rohan! Sir Lionel Charlton and Folliott Court are both for me—for *me!*"



CHAPTER XXI.

SIR LIONEL'S "INTENTIONS."

The false Miss Bermyngham did not immediately carry into execution her resolve to betray Beatrix to her enemies.

In the first place, as she had said in her angry and revengeful self-communion, she did not know the address of Colonel Brand. She had heard mention made of the Chateau Valbeck in the vicinity of Antwerp, but a letter addressed to the Brands at Antwerp was not likely to reach them. Colonel Brand was now in London; but a letter addressed to him at the London general post-office might never meet his eyes.

In the second place, she was afraid of showing her own hand in the betrayal. She desired to work secretly and underhandedly, to conceal her own agency in the matter, and to escape all suspicion of being concerned in it. She well knew that if Sir Lionel Charlton and Lady Folliott were to become convinced that she was base and treacherous enough to betray the young fugitive under their protection, they would send her—the impostor—away from Folliott Court, and never look upon her face again. And so, although it occurred to her to address a letter to Colonel Brand, in care of Mr.

Hillsley, Upper Berkeley Street, London, yet she refrained from doing so, believing that thus she would betray her own agency in the affair.

But, though she was thus obliged to defer her intended wicked work, she believed that the opportunity to effect it, in safety to herself, would soon be afforded her. Colonel Brand might advertise for his fugitive niece ; or some one might trace Sir Lionel and the girl to Folliott Court ; or other chances, now unthought of, might occur by which Beatrix might be secretly betrayed into the hands of her foes.

"I must be patient !" the impostor said to herself. "It won't do to risk anything by undue haste. Sir Lionel Charlton and Lady Folliott would utterly hate and abhor me, if they knew the part I intend to play. I cannot be too guarded, too secret. It is plain that Sir Lionel is beginning to love this Beatrix. I will use every art and wile to lure him from her and make him love me ! And if I fail, if this girl grows dangerous to my plans, and if her enemies fail to discover her, then as a last resort, I can send an anonymous letter to Mr. Hillsley, her trustee. Before she shall come between me and the position I have set my heart upon, I will adopt any means to rid myself of her !"

It was strange what a grim, hard look mantled the pretty pink-and-white face as she came to this conclusion, how all the child-likeness vanished from her features, leaving upon them an expression that was singularly wicked, and how her eyes, modestly downcast no longer, stared boldly before her, hard, black and glittering, a pair of evil eyes, the windows from which now stared forth an evil soul !

In accordance with her determination to mask her enmity under a guise of friendliness, the usurper was very kind and caressing to Beatrix upon the following

day. She proffered her sympathy in a pretty, childlike way, and was soft and purring in the manner that seemed characteristic.

Lady Folliott and Beatrix had a long private and confidential interview during the day in which the matter of clothing was thoroughly discussed. Lady Folliott's maid was called in to take the young lady's measurements in respect to corsage and skirt, and these were duly committed to paper.

"I shall write to my own dressmaker, Elise, to send a complete outfit for a young lady," said Lady Folliott. "We can safely trust the details to her, my dear."

"Excuse me, Lady Folliott," said Beatrix, gently, a flush rising to her clear, pale face, "but I desire to limit Madame Elise to an expenditure of one hundred pounds. I have only four hundred pounds in my possession, and this must maintain me a year until I attain my majority. Something might happen to thrust me forth from the security of this house, and I must have money to keep me from want."

"My dear child," said the baroness, evidently hurt, "this outfit I expect to have charged to me—"

"Impossible, Lady Folliott. I am grateful for your kind intentions, but I am too independent—pardon me—to accept my clothing as a gift even from you, when I am quite able to pay for it myself."

The baroness argued the point, but Beatrix, although gentle, was firm. She would not be persuaded into accepting the outfit which Lady Folliott longed to bestow upon her, and her hostess was finally obliged to yield.

"Very well then, my dear," said the baroness, "you must have your own way. I will limit the expenditure of Elise to a hundred pounds, as you say, and you may defray her bill, since you insist upon doing so. As for

the remainder of your money, however, you can put it away in your trunk ; you will have no need of it. You are to remain at Folliott Court as my guest during the coming year, until you attain your majority. That point is settled."

The letter was written to the London dressmaker by Beatrix herself, who made sundry specifications and stipulations, and was despatched in time to catch the evening mail.

This important duty was fulfilled before the luncheon-bell sounded. After luncheon Lady Folliott and her young guests, including Sir Lionel Charlton, went out to drive. In the evening they had music and conversation, and the hours passed swiftly.

Every day, during the days that followed, the young people were constantly together. They walked in the park, or they visited the conservatory, they rode, they drove, they made little excursions to places in the vicinity, they rowed upon the lake, and contrived to fill every waking hour with enjoyment. They were always attended in their wanderings by an elderly groom and were often chaperoned by Lady Folliott.

The baroness watched the young people closely, but keen-sighted as she was, she could not distinguish any difference in Sir Lionel's manner towards the two ladies.

The false Miss Bermyngham, however, was keener of vision, or else her instinct assisted her. She knew that the baronet's gaze oftenest sought the lovely face of Beatrix. She knew that his voice grew softer when it addressed the young fugitive ; that it was to Beatrix he turned when his feelings were moved ; that it was the sound of Beatrix's step or voice that caused his face to kindle with sudden glow and his eyes to flash with sudden light.

It is needless to say that the impostor used every art

at her command to win the baronet from her rival. The dress of Beatrix had grown shabby, and was totally inappropriate for a dinner dress, for which purpose it was nevertheless obliged to serve. The false Miss Bermyngham took care that her own toilets should be striking, elegant and constantly fresh. She wore the filmiest laces, the brightest ribbons. Her jewelry was changed with every costume. She strove to make the contrast between her personal appearance and that of Beatrix as marked as possible, and in this she succeeded, yet she was obliged to acknowledge to herself, with the deepest chagrin, that the beauty of the young fugitive heiress was quite independent of the adventitious aids of the toilette, and that one looking into the dusk-gray eyes and pure and lovely face of Beatrix Rohan would scarcely give a thought to their owner's attire.

At the end of a week or ten days, however, the boxes containing the wardrobe which had been ordered from London for Beatrix, made their appearance at Folliott Court, and the false Miss Bermyngham lost much of her one point of superiority.

As may be supposed, the impostor's hatred of the young fugitive had not lessened during those days of constant companionship and intercourse. To the contrary, it had grown and strengthened into a terrible and consuming passion.

Beatrix was possessed of all those charming accomplishments which are considered necessary to the perfect education of young ladies of the present day. She had a genuine talent for drawing from nature and for painting in water-colors; she was a delightful reader; she could play the piano, and sing in a sweet, delicious contralto voice as an angel might sing; having been partially educated in Paris, she could speak French like a Pari-

sian, and she was also versed in German and Italian. But the false Miss Bermyngham's sole accomplishment appeared to be instrumental music. This difference between herself and Beatrix added fresh fear every day to the flames of the impostor's jealous hatred. She saw that Sir Lionel bent over the drawings of Beatrix with interest and admiration, that he sought out picturesque spots upon the estate for Beatrix to sketch, that he read with her, in the original, portions of the works of Goethe and Schiller, and that, in short, the tastes of the young baronet and the fugitive heiress were identical, and that from this intimate communion of thought, she, the false Miss Bermyngham, was entirely shut out.

Lady Folliott could not fail also to note the difference between the acquirements of the two young ladies, and knowing that her niece had been supplied with competent governesses and masters, she ascribed the impostor's deficiencies to the indolence induced by the climate of India, to ill-health, and also, in a greater part, to a peculiar modesty and shrinking from attention which she conceived to be an attribute of the usurper.

"She is a dear little violet," thought the baroness, fondly—"a sweet, innocent, clinging young creature, made to adorn a home and to win hearts rather than to challenge admiration. How can Lion help loving her? Dear little Nerea! He has known her for a fortnight. He must love her."

She resolved to ascertain the young baronet's sentiments towards her supposed niece at the earliest possible opportunity.

That opportunity was afforded that very day.

At a late hour of the morning, Lady Folliott entered the library to write a letter. This task accomplished, she sat down in an arm-chair before the hearth, and gave herself up to pleasant thought.

The soft light stole in through stained-glass windows ; marble busts and statues gleamed amid the dusky shadows of corners and niches with spectral effect ; the sea-coal fire glowed redly on the bars of the grate and fender, and shot long, ruddy lances upon the carpet ; and a soft stillness and repose pervaded the air.

The young people were gone out to ride, and were expected momentarily to return. Indeed, as Lady Folliott settled herself more snugly in her chair, she fancied that she heard the clatter of horse's hoofs upon the bridge spanning the moat, and a minute or two later she heard most unmistakably the sounds of arrival at the great porch, and then the outer doors opened, and gay voices and hurrying feet resounded in the hall.

The baroness did not stir, and the two girls, Beatrix, and the false Miss Bermyngham, passed on to the staircase hall, and went up to their rooms. Sir Lionel, a little later, went up to his own apartment. And still Lady Folliott lingered before the library fire, thoughtful and alone.

It might have been half-an-hour later when steps were again heard upon the marble floor of the hall, the door opened, and Sir Lionel Charlton entered the library.

Lady Folliott welcomed him with a smile.

"I was just thinking of sending up for you to come to the library, Lion," she remarked. "Have you a few minutes to spare for me? Or were you in haste to write a letter?"

"Oh, no, I have always time to spare to you, Aunt Folliott," replied Sir Lionel. "I came in only for a fresh volume of Goethe, but I am in no hurry for it. I presume Be—Miss Clare—won't be down until the luncheon-bell rings."

"Then sit down by me, Lion," said the baroness,

indicating a chair quite near her own, "and let us have a little confidential talk together. We have a whole hour before luncheon."

The young baronet took possession of the chair Lady Folliott had indicated.

"This reminds me of the little confidential talks we used to have together in the days of my recklessness and wildness," he said, arching his black brows after a comical manner. "What have I been doing now, Aunt Folliott? Do you intend to lecture me as you used to do?"

Lady Folliott smiled.

"You don't deserve to be lectured now-a-days, Lion," she said, affectionately. "You are sober and thoughtful enough now to atone for your former wildness. I want to speak to you about my niece. How do you like Nerea?"

The dark olive skin of Sir Lionel reddened a little; and his broad brows contracted slightly as he answered:

"I like her very much indeed, Aunt Folliott. She is a sweet, caressing little creature, a being to pet and to love—a little gushing, perhaps, and a trifle affected—"

"Gushing! Affected! What, Nerea!" cried Lady Folliott, horrified. "Lion, you are unjust! Nerea is all impulse, all sweetness, and as artless as an infant!"

"I was only giving my opinion, Aunt Folliott," said Sir Lionel. "Nerea is charming, I admit."

"And you love her, Lion?" said Lady Folliott, eagerly. "You desire to make her your wife?"

The young man's face grew very grave. A troubled look appeared in his black eyes.

"I like Nerea—as a cousin!" he said, frankly. "But she would never suit me as a wife!"

"Lion, what nonsense is this?"

"I am sorry, Aunt Folliott, to disappoint you in your cherished dreams in regard to my union with your niece," said the young man, gently ; "but they are only dreams, and must have the fate of dreams. Nerea's tastes and mine are dissimilar. I do not feel that love for her which it is necessary that I should feel for the woman who is to become my wife. Nerea and I regard each other as brother and sister—"

Lady Folliott interrupted him impatiently.

"Lionel," she exclaimed, "you know how much depends upon your marriage with Nerea. No, don't speak. Hear me out. Your estates are encumbered with mortgages. You have devoted the larger share of your income to paying off these mortgages, and for the ten years to come you will have only four hundred pounds a year to live upon. You are, in brief, virtually a poor man."

Sir Lionel bowed assent.

"I have explained to you often and often about this estate of Folliott Court," continued the baroness. "It brings in an annual income of fifteen thousand a year, its farms being all of the highest productiveness. This estate belonged absolutely to your uncle, George Lord Folliott, and your being his nephew and nearest living male relative, have morally a claim upon it. As it is freehold, you have, however, no legal claim. This you clearly understand. I brought to my husband as my dowry a handsome fortune which was all spent in improvements upon this property. This fortune came from my own family, and I think, therefore, that Nerea, wealthy as she is, has also claims upon me. I cannot divide the property. It must go to you two jointly. Lion, your interests are all at stake. Do not decide hastily against this marriage upon which I have set my heart."

The baroness spoke earnestly, even imploringly. Her fair, handsome face wore a look of keen anxiety, and she laid her hand upon one of Sir Lionel's in unconscious pleading.

"My dear aunt," said Lionel affectionately, "you have been a second mother to me. It pains me to go counter to your wishes, but marriage is one of the most important events in a man's life, and I must choose my wife for myself. Even to please you, Aunt Folliott, I cannot become a party to a marriage of convenience. You have told me that whichever of us two—Nerea or I—shall decline this marriage which you have proposed, that one shall forfeit all claim to your property. With all respect for Miss Bermyngham, I decline the alliance. Give your property to her, Aunt Folliott, but do not withdraw from me the affection which I prize as one of the greatest goods of my life."

He raised her ladyship's white and jeweled hand to his lips.

Lady Folliott had been about to reply angrily, but her heart softened under Sir Lionel's affectionate caress. Her features relaxed, and she exclaimed, in a voice that trembled :

"My dear boy, why will you stand so in your own light? Do not be so obstinate, so headstrong! You know I love you as if you were my own son. I love Nerea also as if she were my daughter. You have peculiar claims upon my niece. Miles Bermyngham, Nerea's father, was your mother's cousin, and before his marriage with my sister he was your mother's lover. His last will devised all his wealth to his daughter, but, should she die unmarried and without making a will, all his property is to descend to you, the son of his cousin, his first love. I think Nerea feels some sort of

obligation to be thus imposed upon her to make your life free from cares and pecuniary anxieties—"

A door at the farther end of the library, which was slightly open, was suddenly jarred at this juncture. Lady Folliott and Sir Lionel were too much absorbed in their conversation to notice the movement. Neither had any suspicion that a listener was lurking within sound of their voices, but there was one. The false Miss Bermyngham had followed the young baronet down stairs, and had been upon the point of following him also into the library through another door than that by which he had entered, when she heard the sound of voices within. Being essentially cat-like in her nature, treacherous, a born spy, and eager to ascertain the secret opinions of others, having always a hope to hear something concerning herself, she paused, as was her frequent habit, to listen. And so she had heard all that had passed between the two.

The allusion to the will of the late Miles Bermyngham had startled her, although she had been informed of the tenor of that will before.

"I wonder what Sir Lionel and Lady Folliott would say," she thought, "if they knew that the real Nerea Bermyngham is dead and obscurely buried, and that at this moment Sir Lionel is the lawful owner of the wealth I have usurped? But they will never know it. I shall keep my secret even beyond the grave. I am safe, absolutely safe! I shall enjoy the property; I shall marry Sir Lionel despite his objections and I shall be mistress at Folliott Court. But he is speaking now. What does he say?"

She bent her ear eagerly to listen anew.

"Aunt Folliott," the young baronet was saying, "I shall never marry from motives of policy or from gratitude. I respect Nerea: I like her. But I have no

claims upon her or her wealth. I shall marry for love, and I do not love Nerea as I should love the woman who is to be nearest to me of all the earth."

"But you do love Beatrix Rohan!" exclaimed Lady Folliott, impatiently, "I have feared this, Lion. You do not deny it? It was a sad day for us all when you found her in London. Lionel, have you told her that you love her? Have you asked her to be your wife?"

"Not yet," replied the baronet. "You have guessed my secret, Aunt Folliott. I do love Beatrix, with all my heart and soul. I have loved her from the hour we met. She is under your protection, an inmate of your house, and I intended to ask first of all, both upon her account and my own, your consent to my addressing her. I intended to ask you this very day. Will you grant it, Aunt Folliott?"

"You have only known her a fortnight, Lion!"

"But it has been a fortnight of constant intercourse," urged the baronet. "And we became well acquainted in London, you know, before coming here. We have been thrown together constantly, and have seen more of each other in a single day than most people see of each other in months. I should love Beatrix if she were a beggar-maid. It is herself I love, Aunt Folliott, and if she will marry me, I shall be the happiest man in the world!"

"Do you think that she loves you?"

"I do not know, of course. I have my fears, knowing her so well and my own deserts, but I have also my hopes," answered Sir Lionel. "Have I your permission to address her, Aunt Folliott, to tell her of my love?"

"Not yet," said the baroness. "You have not known her long enough. Wait another month, Lion. See more of Nerea's sweet, artless ways before you commit

yourself to Beatrix. I will not consent to have you speak to Beatrix just yet. It is true that she is an excellent match, well-born, high-bred; an heiress, a beauty, but your interests all lie in a union with Nerea. I love Beatrix; I own it frankly; but Nerea, with her soft, caressing ways, and the tie of relationship between us, is infinitely dearer to me, and I want you to marry her. Wait a single month, Lionel. See these two girls together; study them more closely. For my sake, wait!"

"I will wait," replied the baronet, gravely, "the specified month; but I assure you, Aunt Folliott, that years of waiting will make no difference in my love for Beatrix. I will wait out of deference to your wishes. I would not be too precipitate in approaching Beatrix upon this subject, but at the expiration of a month it is understood between us, is it not, that I am at liberty to ask Beatrix to become my wife?"

"It is so understood," said Lady Folliott, with unconcealed bitterness. "I had set my heart upon your marriage to Nerea, Lionel, and I shall continue to hope for it. I cannot think that the great hope of my life is to be doomed to disappointment. But if you adhere to this love for Beatrix, you will forfeit all chance of becoming my heir! You will go to your bride encumbered with debts, and people will call you a fortune-hunter! How will your proud spirit bear that? Marry Beatrix, and I shall make Nerea my sole heir! I give you one month to think the matter over and decide. We will not talk further at present on this subject. Leave me, Lionel. I want to be alone."

She waved her hand, dismissing him. The false Miss Bermyngham had barely time to effect her escape unobserved when Sir Lionel quitted the library.



CHAPTER XXII.

TWO NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS.

The false Miss Bermyngham beat a retreat to her own room, from which she did not emerge until the luncheon bell rang. Then she descended to the breakfast-room, as airy and gay and pleasant as usual, apparently as playful as a pet kitten.

Lady Folliott beamed tenderly upon her. The baroness thought the impostor a delicate, dainty, sensitive being, made to live upon sunshine and smiles. She believed the girl to be deeply interested in Sir Lionel Charlton, and blamed herself severely for having fostered that interest. Nevertheless, she hoped in the depths of her own heart that the young baronet would appreciate the seeming artlessness and innocence of her supposed niece, and transfer to her his love and devotion.

"He would have loved Nerea if he had seen her first," she said to herself. "He pities Beatrix, but surely he cannot have fixed his affections upon her beyond the power of recall. He is proud. He will not willingly expose himself to the imputation of being called a fortune-hunter, by marrying Beatrix. Oh, I am quite sure that all is not lost yet!"

After luncheon, the young people went out for a stroll in the park. The May air was soft and balmy, and

they remained out-of-doors for several hours, until it was time to dress for dinner.

Lady Folliott had intended to seek a private interview with the false Miss Bermyngham that very day, and to ascertain the state of the girl's feelings toward Sir Lionel Charlton, but the opportunity was not afforded her.

The baroness was the first to enter the drawing-room before the dinner hour, and she walked up and down the great apartment, looking very grand and stately in her trained robe of black velvet, with diamonds in her hair and about her throat, and with an Elizabethan ruff of point lace rising about her long, white neck.

She was walking thus, her face very grave and thoughtful, when the false Miss Bermyngham came fluttering into the room.

The baroness's face brightened with a warm and loving smile, as her gaze rested upon the impostor, who had made an unusually brilliant toilet and who was looking remarkably pretty, in a peach-colored silk trimmed with puffs and ruffles, and with ornaments of the palest pink coral.

The girl ran up to Lady Folliott for a kiss.

"My dear," said the baroness, as she bestowed the caress, "you are looking very lovely this evening. I do not see how any heart can resist you. You are a dear, loving little creature, Nerea, made just to be petted and loved. By the by, my dear, you remember what I told you upon that night of our meeting in London concerning my hopes for your future and that of Sir Lionel Charlton? I was just thinking of it. And I was reminded that you have never given me your opinion of my nephew. What do you think of him, Nerea?"

The girl drooped her head, hiding it upon Lady Folliott's shoulder.

The baroness looked startled and changed color.

"Do you mean, Nerea, darling," she said, "that—that you are interested in Lion?"

There was no answer, unless a quivering of the small figure in her arms might be so construed.

A look of distress mantled Lady Folliott's countenance. A fear assailed her lest she should have led this girl to fix her heart upon Sir Lionel Charlton, and lest sorrow to her supposed niece should result from well-meant plans.

This fear was confirmed by the hypocrite, who presently whispered tremulously :

"You—you told me, Aunt Folliott, that you wanted me to marry Sir Lionel, and he is so handsome, and so—and so—"

"And so you like him, dear?"

The girl nodded silently.

Lady Folliott made no answer, but kissed the impostor very tenderly and gravely. There was a silence between them, which was broken by the sound of approaching steps in the hall. The false Miss Bermyngham broke from the clasp of the baroness, and hurried to a window, looking out, apparently to hide her emotion. Lady Folliott had scarcely composed her countenance when Sir Lionel Charlton entered the apartment.

And directly after him appeared Beatrice.

The young fugitive heiress was dressed in a pure gray silk, with a knot of scarlet ribbons at her throat, and a scarlet velvet sash tied carelessly about her waist. Her hair was arranged in picturesque fashion, and its tawny crimps and waves contrasted finely with the deeper, ruddier, artificial-looking coloring of the false Miss Bermyngham's tresses.

Lady Folliott greeted her guest with smiles, yet with a certain bitterness which she found it difficult to con-

ceal. Had it not been for Beatrix, she said to herself, Sir Lionel Charlton would have fallen in love with Nerea. Greatly as she liked Beatrix, she thought it peculiarly hard to herself and her supposed niece that the young fugitive, with the piquant beauty, vivid intelligence, and noble character, should be brought just at this time into such close contrast with that pretty little ingénue, the false Miss Bermyngham.

"I cannot believe that the mischief is done, however," she said to herself. "Beatrix is as generous as the sun. Suppose I were to tell her outright, vailing my purpose, of course, that it is the one desire of my life to see Lionel and Nerea husband and wife? If I were to tell her that, I am sure that if Lion were to ask her to marry him she would refuse him—she has such a nice sense of honor—such a keen sense of gratitude! And she would never betray my confidence. I think I'll tell her this very evening. She has doubtless forgotten the hint I gave her upon the subject upon that night of her arrival at the Court."

The baroness pondered this new idea throughout the dinner hour, giving way to frequent abstractions, from which she aroused herself with sudden starts and apologies.

After dinner they returned to the drawing-room. They had scarcely settled themselves—Lady Folliott with her wool embroidery, Beatrix with her drawing, Sir Lionel with a book of engravings, and the false Miss Bermyngham at the piano—when the butler entered with the post-bag, which he delivered into his lady's own hands.

A messenger was despatched twice each day to the little post-office at Folliott Fens. The morning-mail was considered of most importance, being generally heavier; but the post-bag was quite full to-night.

Lady Folliott unlocked the bag with her own private key which hung from her watch chain, and emptied letters and newspapers upon the table.

As the butler retired, the young people laid aside their occupations and regarded the baroness with expectancy. The false Miss Bermyngham came flying from the piano, her pink-and-white face all eagerness, crying out :

“Is there something for me, Aunt Folliott? There must be something for me, you know. There should be a letter from Emmanuel about that set of rubies—they must be mounted by this time—and Elise must have finished my new embroidered polonaise, and—”

She paused for sheer lack of breath.

Lady Folliott smiled indulgently upon her, and resumed her task of sorting the letters.

“Two for you, Lion,” she said, handing them to him. “The London mail was heavy to day. Nothing for you, Beatrice, my dear, but for you ‘no news is good news.’ There are no London letters for you, Nerea, darling, but the Indian mail is in. Here are two letters for you from India.”

The impostor started.

“For me?” she exclaimed, opening her eyes suddenly and involuntarily, but dropping the heavy lids upon the instant over the bold, evil black eyes. “For me?”

“Yes, for you, dear. You seem surprised,” said Lady Folliott. “I do believe, my dear child, that you haven’t written to any one in India since you arrived in England. Is not this so?”

“I wrote to Norton—my dear old nurse and maid—from London,” said the false Miss Bermyngham, with a sickly sort of smile. “I was too anxious and impatient to wait until just before the mail should leave—in fact, there was a mail on the point of departure, I now remember. But these letters were sent after me by

next post. You will excuse me, Aunt Folliott, if I read them ?”

She took up the two envelopes and retired to a little table in a distant corner upon which were placed two wax lights.

Sir Lionel Charlton busied himself with his own letters. Beatrix resumed her drawing. Lady Folliott read her letters—she had received several, the majority of them begging communications—and the impostor was entirely unnoticed, as she turned her back to her companions and tremblingly proceeded to examine the missives she had received.

They were of course intended for the real Miss Bermyngham, the pale little insignificant looking girl who was buried in an obscure grave under a false name, but the impostor had no scruple about reading them.

The first letter she examined was a pleasant, gossiping communication from a lady friend of the dead Indian heiress, containing Calcutta society news, and allusions to old mutual friends ; but it was of no importance and the girl laid it down with a sigh of relief.

“ I don’t know what I dreaded,” she said to herself, in her own heart. “ But an awful fear and horror came upon me at sight of the Indian post-mark. For a moment I thought I was going to faint. What a wretched coward I am, in spite of my boldness and audacity ! What letter is this ? The handwriting is poor enough. It must be from that doting old nurse-woman, Norton. She seemed fairly to worship her mistress. The letter is no account ; but I may as well read it.”

The envelope was of course blue paper. The sheet within was similar ; the handwriting weak and poor ; the words ill-spelled and the style illiterate, but the

contents of the letter proved to be of the most remarkable and absorbing interest.

A strange terror gathered upon the girl as she read. She caught her breath sharply. Again that sensation of fainting came upon her. The paper rustled in her hands, and a quick, defiant, horrified look shot in one bold blaze from her black eyes.

The first page of the letter contained such expressions of love and tender yearning as an old nurse might be expected to lavish upon the young mistress who had been as near to her as her own child ; and such items of news as a trusted dependent might be expected to send her young lady. But upon the second page occurred this paragraph :

“ My mind misgives me, my deer Miss Nerea, about that yung woman that you took as your made to England. She may be all rite, and again she may nott. Tee day after you saled, a police-offiser in plain close came to inquire of me who the yung woman was that you took with you for your made. I told him that her name was Agatha Walden. Hè wanted her description. I had to describe her. When he found out that her complexin was fare, and that she had lite hare, then he said as he was on the rong sent ; that he was after a gurl with black hare, which was a murdress. He thot that this murdress gurl wood attempt escape from the countrie, and he did not no but she was gon as your made. But Agatha Walden did not answer his description, and he said the gurl he wanted was probly hidin' in the toun somewhare.

“ So, my deer, althow your made is not the gurl he wantid, and Ime mity glad of it, for I shouldn't sleep nites if I thot you had a murdress to wate on you, and ready to cut your throate and poison you if you spoke

sharp to her, the hussy ; yett Ime afrade this Agatha may have folts and perhaps turn out some was rong, althow she had sutch good references. Keep a sharp eye on her, my deer. I onely hope as Ime doin her an unjustis.

“ That murdress woman the policeman was affter must hav been a reglar bad one, for just won weke after he came to see me along came anuther person to inquire after her too. And this last fellow was mity curious in his inquiries after your made. Seems he was hunting down every person that had left Calcutta within three weeks. But Agatha’s description puzzled him to. I think he wan’t more’n haf sattisfied when he went awa. The last thing he sez, sez he : if it wasn’t for the hare and complexin—and there he stopd.

“ This sets me thinkin, dear Miss Nerea, what terrible people thare is in this world. Do be cairful. Don’t trust that smilin made of yours too much. I one she is pretty and like a child, but you must be on your guard against every won.”

There was more in the same strain. The false Miss Bermyngham—she who had entered the service of the India heiress under the assumed name of Agatha Walden—read every line with a devouring gaze.

When she had finished the letter she read anew the paragraphs we have transcribed.

Gradually her coolness and self-confidence returned to her. A smile—strange and wintry, but a smile—gathered anew on her red mouth, and she thought :

“ I outwitted them most thoroughly. As that policeman said, ‘ the hair and complexion ’ are an obstacle not to be gotten over. And if they trace that—that woman under the disguise of Agatha Walden, and follow her to England, why, they are stopped at the Lon-

don railway terminus by the statement that Agatha Walden is dead. And they will even be shown her grave ! I am safe—safe—safe !”

Her face beamed now with a look of triumph. She was herself again. She thrust the nurse's letter in her pocket, and taking the other in her hand approached Lady Folliott, who was removing the wrappers from the newspapers.

“One of my letters was from dear old Norton, Aunt Folliott,” she said, lightly. “This is from Mrs. Carson, an old friend of mine, and of yours also, I think. She visited you at Folliott Court when she was in England a year ago. Would you like to see what she writes ?”

She gave the letter into the baroness's possession, and waited until it had been read. After comments had been made upon it, she resumed charge of it, and took up a copy of the *Times*, saying with a laugh :

“I like to look at ‘the agony column’ and read the personal notices. Don't you, Beatrix ? Ah, isn't this odd ? Just listen to this notice, Trixy, dear,” and the impostor grew soft and purring and caressing, while a treacherous look came in sidelong fashion from her eyes, “does this mean *you* ? ‘A liberal reward will be paid to any one giving information of the whereabouts of Miss Beatrix Rohan to her guardian and friends. Miss Rohan is twenty years of age, of medium height, very fair, with golden-brown hair, deep gray eyes, and slender figure. Has plenty of money in her possession and is supposed to be living under an assumed name in lodgings. She is educated, refined and accomplished, sane on all subjects but one ; is very plausible and would not be deemed insane by a casual acquaintance. Apply to Mr. James Hillsley, No. — Upper Berkeley Street, or to Colonel Brand, Minton's Hotel, Piccadilly, London.’ ”

A haunted expression came into the eyes of Beatrix.

"You are safe here, Miss Rohan," said Sir Lionel, in a low voice. "You need have no fears."

Lady Folliott opened her India newspaper with the intention of turning the subject.

"I always find something interesting in the Calcutta journals," she observed. "I nearly always come upon a familiar name, or some curious fact. Now here is a singular advertisement," and she lifted her eyes to glance benevolently upon the little group. "It smacks of the horrible, though. Just hear it!"

And with kindly design of diverting the mind of Beatrix from her own anxieties, Lady Folliott read the notice of which she had spoken, as follows:

"ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.—The above-named reward will be paid for information leading to the discovery of one Lilius Voe, who is supposed to have killed her husband and child upon the 19th ult. by poison, and who fled upon the same night. Is believed to be still in Calcutta. Said Lilius Voe is twenty-three years of age, is small and delicate, has dark complexion, black hair and black eyes. Is an actress by profession and capable of assuming characters foreign to her own. Apply—"

Lady Folliott allowed the newspaper to fall into her lap. Sir Lionel made some remark appropriate to the reading. No one noticed that the false Miss Bermingham had averted her face, and that upon its pink-and-white prettiness was a look of horror unutterable—that in her great staring black eyes was an expression of cowardly terror—and that one hand was clutching at her red-gold locks as if she would assure herself of their color! Did that singular advertisement concern her?



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE IMPOSTOR'S TREACHERY.

Before the attention of her companions could be called to her strange silence, the false Miss Bermingham had conquered the frightful terrors which assailed her, and had attained to something of her usual calmness.

It was marvelous what a power of self-control dwelt in that slender frame of hers ; what an iron will was hidden beneath that pink-and-white prettiness, those soft, cooing ways, that innocent, childlike seeming !

And yet, conscious that there was something strange and ghastly still about her face, she presently arose and walked to one of the windows with a step that faltered in spite of herself, and stood staring out upon the terrace and lawn and moat-bridge with bold, black, desperate eyes.

She heard Lady Folliott and Beatrix discussing the advertisement of Colonel Brand, but their words struck upon her hearing as meaningless sounds ; she did not listen to them. But, after a little, the baroness took up her Indian newspaper again, which lay upon her knee, and as her eyes rested again upon the singular advertisement she had read aloud for the purpose of diverting the mind of Beatrix from that other advertisement which the impostor had read, she said :

"An odd name that—Lilias Voe! A murderess! And so young, too! How could a woman murder her husband and child? She must have been mad! No mother while in possession of her right mind, would have willfully destroyed the little life which had sprung from her own; could have stricken out the light from the loving eyes and baby face that had lain upon her breast; could have hushed forever the sweet prattling voice that lisped her name! The woman was surely mad."

A tremor shook the slight form at the window. No one noticed it, nor did they notice how rigid the impostor's figure grew after that manifestation of emotion.

"This notice has an unaccountable fascination for me," said Lady Folliott, after a short pause. "She was an actress, it says. Did you ever see her, Nerea, darling? Did you ever see this actress, Lilias Voe?"

The false Miss Bermyngham did not turn around. She appeared to be watching intently some object upon the lawn. But she answered in a strained, hard voice, which had yet in it an artificial lightness:

"I, Aunt Folliott? What should I know of actresses? You forget," and her tones became lower and graver, "that I have not attended any place of amusement for a year—not since papa's death! I never heard of the actress you have read about—I don't know anything about actresses."

"Forgive me, Nerea, darling," said the baroness; "I must seem very thoughtless. And yet I supposed that you might have seen this actress in former days, or that you might have heard of her. I am not fond of the horrible," she added, with a smile, "so we will dismiss this advertisement, which has come up so oddly and which, as I said, had a very singular fascination for me."

Thus dismissing the subject, Lady Folliott turned the newspaper and plunged into the Indian society news.

The impostor continued to stand at the window and to stare out upon the lawn, gardens and park with wide-open eyes in which was an evil and defiant expression. What were her thoughts? What had called that haggard and ghastly look to the pretty, childish mouth and eyes? Whatever it was, she presently put it from her, and when Lady Folliott called to her, telling her some item of Calcutta news, the false Miss Bermyngham turned from the window and approached the baroness with a soft, sinuous grace and with downcast eyes and a face all smiles and gayety and sweetness.

"What! Mary Champion married!" she exclaimed. "And to that tall, awkward, red-haired Captain Harrock? That is news, Aunt Folliott! And yet she has been engaged to him for years. Is any one else whom I know married or dead?"

A little discussion upon the various items of society gossip followed. The impostor bore her part in it as well as the real Miss Bermyngham could have done. She seemed familiar with every name mentioned; she told little stories and anecdotes about family friends, and was laughing and light-hearted, and never for one instant at a loss for an appropriate remark or allusion.

After a time the impostor sauntered to the piano and executed some brilliant opera music. Beatrix was called upon for a song and accompaniment, and the evening wore away. The tea-tray was brought up at half-past nine, and at eleven o'clock the party separated for the night.

The false Miss Bermyngham entered her boudoir, locked the door, and passed on into the adjoining dressing-room.

A dozen wax-lights burned softly upon the low

marble mantelpiece and dressing-table. A sea-coal fire glowed redly in the grate. A big chair, upholstered in pale blue, was drawn up on the hearth-rug and upon the chair was thrown a furred, white dressing-gown. Jewel-cases filled with sparkling gems littered the tables. The French maid, Finette, was engaged in polishing a magnificent diamond necklace that lay across her hands and upon her knees like a river of light. She arose at the entrance of her young mistress, and dropped the ornament into a brass-bound casket before her which contained the remainder of the parure.

"What are you doing, Finette?" demanded the false Miss Bermyngham, a little sharply, as she crossed the floor, and halted before the fire.

"I was only polishing the necklace, mademoiselle," said Finette. "Ma foi! Such diamonds! They are fit for a queen, my lady. I never saw such gems before!"

"They are all very rare and fine," remarked the impostor, with a pleased smile. "My papa selected them with the greatest care. He was twenty years in collecting the jewels in that set. They are all East Indian gems."

"They are like stars, my lady," said Finette, with enthusiasm. "You should marry, mademoiselle—pardon—and be presented at court, and wear these diamonds at your presentation. Even your queen of England, with her Koh-i-noor and crown and jewels would turn to stare at mademoiselle."

"I shall be presented by and by, perhaps before my marriage," said the impostor. "My aunt, Lady Folliott, desires me to wait until my marriage, however, and I may choose to wait."

"Mademoiselle will make a great sensation at court,"

said the maid, who had long since learned that her young mistress was accessible to flattery. "Mademoiselle would make a lovely bride ; she will look like a fairy. The housekeeper was saying this evening at tea that Sir Lionel Charlton was Miss Clare's lover. I made bold to contradict her. Miss Clare is very beautiful, but who would look at Miss Clare when my lady is near ?"

The impostor's pretty scarlet mouth contracted a little.

"So that is the servants' gossip, is it?" she asked. "Some ladies, Finette, would scorn to listen to the talk of the servants' hall, but I like to know what is said below as well as above stairs. And so the housekeeper thinks Sir Lionel Charlton in love with Miss Clare?"

"Yes, my lady. And the housekeeper told me, my lady, that if you should die unmarried, before attaining your majority, that Sir Lionel Charlton would inherit all your wealth. She said that Mr. Bermyngham had made a will to that effect. Surely that is not true, my lady?"

"What does it matter whether it be true or false?" said the impostor somewhat sharply. "You may undress me, Finette."

The Frenchwoman silently obeyed the bidding of her mistress. The silken robe was removed and the furred, white dressing-gown, all warmth and perfume, donned in its stead. And then the false Miss Bermyngham sat down in a low chair before the dressing-table and Finette brushed out her silken lengths of yellow hair.

"Mademoiselle has superb hair," said the Frenchwoman, at last. "Superb ! So rich, so thick, so golden ! I have seen hair like this but few times, my lady. It is not often that this shade comes natural."

"What do you mean by that ?" asked the impostor,

looking into the mirror with sleepy, half-shut eyes that yet watched the dark and sallow face of her attendant with the keen scrutiny of a lynx. "How does this yellow shade come, if not naturally?"

She drew a long tress over her own fingers and examined it carefully. It was soft, lustrous, and evenly tinted, and redolent with perfume.

"Why," said Finette, "in these days they have bleaching liquids and golden dyes and what not. Actresses know all about them—"

The false Miss Bermyngham started.

"Dear me, you pulled my hair; you are a savage, Finette," she said, petulently.

"Pardon, mademoiselle. I will be more careful. Has mademoiselle never heard of the Liquid Gold, the Aura, the—"

"Never!" interrupted the impostor, vehemently. "What are they?"

"Why, dyes to change dark hair into golden, my lady. Of course, mademoiselle, who is a blonde, would not have need to change the color of her hair; of course, mademoiselle's hair is the real golden by nature, but there are many less fortunate, and they, desiring blonde hair resort to dyes."

The Frenchwoman plied her long-bristled, ivory-backed brush with gentle assiduity. Her mistress continued to look into the mirror, on either side of which clusters of wax-lights burned softly, and her gaze dwelt furtively upon the face of her attendant.

Suddenly the maid's face lighted up. She uttered an exclamation, and paused with uplifted brush.

"What is it, Finette?" demanded the girl.

"Nothing, mademoiselle; only I fancied that the roots of your hair were dark. They look black—"

"Nonsense, Finette!" exclaimed the false Miss Ber-

myingham, quite sharply. What an idea! It is the shadow falling on my head. Take a candle and look. You are so near-sighted—you told me so yourself when I engaged you—that you would fancy anything. The roots of my hair black? I could fancy you had been drinking. A repetition of such vagary upon your part, Finette, will lose you your present comfortable quarters and the very handsome salary I am giving you."

The impostor's coolness and haughtiness quite quenched Finette. She murmured an apology, declaring that she had spoken thoughtlessly, and that she could now see distinctly, that what she had taken to be the coloring of the roots of her lady's hair was merely a shadow flung from the girandole.

"See that you don't make such another mistake," said her mistress, quietly. "It may result in something more than the loss of your place."

The Frenchwoman's sallow cheeks flushed a vivid red. The threat of the young lady was evidently full of meaning to her—a meaning intensely disagreeable.

"*Bien*, mademoiselle," she said. "I will remember."

The ceremony of brushing the young lady's hair was completed in silence.

"Twelve o'clock!" said the impostor, with a glance towards the mantel-piece. "You may leave me, Finette. I want to write a letter or two, and I'll do it this evening while I am in the mood. I had a letter from my dear old nurse in India to-night, and somehow I can't wait until morning to answer it. Lay out my night-dress, Finette, and go."

The maid finished her duties and departed.

When she had gone, the impostor secured her doors and re-entered her dressing-room.

"I wonder if my hair does really look black at the

roots?" she said to herself, pulling out one long golden hair and examining it critically. "Nonsense! It was the shadow falling upon it. I have been careful to excess. Yet nevertheless I will be still more guarded. I will arrange my hair every day instead of every third day. 'Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.' I find it easy to attend to my own hair after Finette retires at night, and she certainly does not suspect—she cannot suspect—that the color of my hair is not natural."

The impostor slipped on a dressing-jacket over her white gown, and, producing a couple of keys which she wore upon a golden chain about her neck under her dress, she unlocked one of her trunks, and brought to the light a massive brass-bound casket, the size of which was a little more than a foot square.

The second key upon her chain opened this casket, which was filled with bottles and boxes and gallipots of cosmetics for the skin, and liquid applications for the hair.

The false Miss Bermyngham was an artist in the peculiar line now indicated. She applied a golden-tinted fluid to her hair with a tiny sponge, exhibiting a boundless patience and attention to minute points, and half-an-hour's steady work satisfied her.

"That will do!" she thought, contentedly. "I defy anybody to discover any flaw or 'shadow' now about my hair. In the morning I will touch up my complexion as usual. I suppose Finette would give her right hand to possess the secret of this casket, if she only suspected its existence. But if she were to discover this, and a thousandfold more also, she would never dare to betray me!—thanks to my astuteness in securing a maid with a bad previous history. She knows that I know that she robbed her former mistress in Paris, and she

knows that I know that the French police have offered a reward for her, and she knows that at the first sign of her treachery to me I would betray her to justice ! She fears me, child as she thinks me. That is well !”

With a smile on her scarlet mouth, the girl stowed her precious casket away, securely in its place of concealment, and locked the trunk, placing the keys in her bosom.

Finette had pushed a small table before the fire, placing upon it her mistress's exquisite little ebony desk—the desk which had belonged to the real Miss Bermyngham. The girl now took possession of the easy-chair, unlocked the desk, and took out certain letters and diaries, which had been written by the India heiress.

“My handwriting is very like hers,” she thought, studying the penmanship attentively—“the same angular English hand, thanks to the masters who teach it. I suppose there is scarcely any variation in the penmanship of ninety-nine women out of every hundred. Some of her letters are a trifle peculiar. I must copy them over and over until to make them in that way will be as second nature to me. Old Norton's letter must be answered, I suppose ; and the sooner the better, since I have not written to her at all. I will relieve her mind about the girl Agatha Walden—I'll tell her that the girl is dead.”

She practiced the handwriting of the true Miss Bermyngham for a full hour, and then wearying of her task, deferred her letter to Mrs. Norton until the succeeding evening.

But there was one task she would not defer.

She was full of hatred of Beatrix. The pure and exquisite beauty of the fugitive heiress aroused her bitterest envy. She had overheard Sir Lionel Charl-

ton's avowal of love for Beatrix when in conversation with Lady Folliott, and this avowal had quickened her dormant capabilities of evil into activity. She was resolved to betray Beatrix at once to her enemies.

In the bottom of her writing-desk she found some coarse writing-paper and envelopes, both of a yellowish color. She destroyed all of this except enough for one letter. This one letter—the message of betrayal—she set herself to concoct with all the ability she possessed.

She wrote with her left hand in an awkward style, and took care to spell her words incorrectly, borrowing an idea from the missive of good Mrs. Norton. Her letter, when finished, read as follows :

FOLLIOTT FENS, LINCOLNSHIRE, }
May 19th, 1873. }

MISTER COLONEL BRAND, *Minton's Hotel London* :

I am in the habbit of taking in the *times* at a penny on the second day, wich is comon in thees parts, and i see your advertizemint aboutt a yung leddy which name is Beatrix Rohan. I make bold to anser and claim the reward. Sir Linel Charlton is visting his ant, Leddy Folliott, of Folliott Cort, near this village. He brot with him a yung leddy he called Miss Clare, but one of the servants at the Cort bein my cuzzin toled me that the yung leddy's furst name is Beatrix, and her frens has ben crooel to her, and she is a hidin from them. I think this Miss Beatrix Clare is your Miss Beatrix Rohan. So no more at present from yours truly. ANN CLARK.

This delectable composition was regarded by its author with admiration. She sealed, stamped, and addressed the envelope, and placed it in the pocket of her morning robe, which lay upon 'a chair, ready for use.

"I must deposit it in the post-office myself," she thought. "I cannot put it in the post-bag. I cannot trust Finette to post it. Fortunately, the Folliott Fens post-office is also a fancy-goods shop. I'll go in in the morning, and buy some Berlin wools and drop in my letter. I have done a good evening's work. I flatter myself that Miss Beatrice Rohan is disposed of. When she is removed from my path, I fancy I sha'n't have much difficulty in winning Sir Lionel Charlton. All I want is a clear field!"

She arose yawning and slowly disrobed. Fifteen minutes later her lights were extinguished, with the exception of her usual night lamp, and she had fallen asleep, her red-gold hair streaming over her pillow, her pretty pink-and-white face looking almost like a mask in the dimness, save for the smile of exultation that yet lingered about her lips!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESULT OF THE TREACHERY.

Her treacherous letter written, the false Miss Bermyngham now devoted all her energies to the task of posting it secretly.

Upon the morning following its concoction, she arose early and spent an hour at her toilet, calling into requisition the resources of her hidden brass-bound casket, and making up her pink-and-white complexion, before she summoned Finette to her assistance. She felt that she could defy her maid's keenest scrutiny in regard to her hair, and was unusually gracious, condescending and pleasant.

She descended to the breakfast-room at the usual hour. Sir Lionel Charlton was standing before the fire and greeted her with the usual salutations. Beatrix and Lady Folliott soon appeared, as did the morning post-bag.

After breakfast the baroness excused herself upon the plea of having letters to write, and retired to her own apartments.

"We will have our usual walk in the park, will we not?" asked Sir Lionel, looking from one to the other of the two girls.

Beatrix glanced at the false Miss Bermyngham and smiled assent. The impostor appeared to reflect, and cried out in her impulsive fashion :

"Oh, I'm so sorry ! But I can't go. It is too bad, isn't it now, Trixy ? But, you see, I must match those Berlin wools in my chair-cover, and I want some narrow lace, and a hundred other trifles, and I must go over to Folliott Fens for them. I'll drive over in Aunt Folliott's dear little pony-phaeton, and I won't ask you to go with me, Trixy. I'll make all the haste possible, and perhaps I'll join you in the park."

She rang the bell and ordered the vehicle she had mentioned. Then, with laughing adieus, she hurried away and disappeared up the stairs.

Beatrix and Sir Lionel procured their hats and went into the garden.

They had vanished into the soft shadows of the park when, nearly an hour later, the false Miss Bermyngham, in an exquisite morning costume of blue cashmere and silk, and with a blue hat on her head, and long, white, embroidered gauntlets on her hands, came down the stair and out into the carriage porch.

Lady Folliott's phaeton was in waiting. A pair of beautiful shaggy-maned ponies were attached to it, and

in the high single seat behind was seated an elderly groom, in livery, with folded arms.

The impostor was assisted into the broad, luxurious seat in front, took up her reins, and drove rapidly down the avenue, across the moat bridge, and out at the open gates into the high road.

Her face never flushed nor paled, it was impossible for her emotions to betray themselves through the paint so artistically laid upon the countenance, but this morning her secret delight and exultation showed themselves in the glittering light that shot from her black, bold eyes, wide open now that there was no one to look into them, and in the strange evil smile that flickered about her lips.

She drove up the principal street of Folliott Fens, and halted abruptly before the fancy-goods shop, in which was also the post-office. The groom assisted her to descend and remained standing at the heads of the horses.

With her gown rustling behind her as she walked, and with her treacherous letter safely hidden in her pocket, the girl swept into the little shop.

Upon one side, behind a long counter, were fancy goods in variety: upon the other was the post-office department, with rows of numbered and lettered boxes, with a little door for the delivery of letters, and under it a small slit in the wall for the reception of drop letters.

The false Miss Bermyngham gave one glance towards the post-office and then advanced to the fancy goods counter, behind which an elderly lady was seated upon a high stool engaged in fancy crochet work.

"Can you match these wools?" inquired the impostor, laying down a little parcel. "They are all new colors, and I want them exactly matched."

The shopwoman engaged in the task with that enthusiasm so often displayed by people in her line of business. The girl made some pretense of assisting her, but, tiring of the task, walked to the door, peeped into the post-office boxes curiously, looked in at the delivery-door and managed to slip in her letter unseen.

Then, all smiles and goodhumor, she returned to the assistance of the shopwoman, and presently completed her purchases. The parcel was carried out for her, and she was soon on her way back to Folliott Court.

"That was well managed," she said to herself. "No one saw me drop in the letter. No one will suspect my agency in the matter. The only thing that will strike this Colonel Brand as mysterious will be the fact that his mysterious correspondent does not come forward, confess her indenture, and claim her reward. It is quite possible that her failure to come forward may show that the girl's betrayal is not an affair of greed. But no one can suspect me. They dare not suspect me."

And with her mind quite at rest, she re-entered the mansion of Folliott Court and returned to her own rooms.

She was unusually affectionate toward Beatrix throughout that day and the day that followed. She lavished pet names upon the young fugitive heiress; she visited her in Beatrix's rooms, and besought Beatrix to return the visit; she was soft, sweet, and caressing, kissing—Judas-like—even while she betrayed.

Now Beatrix, it must be confessed, did not greatly like the pretty supposed niece of her hostess. Beatrix's nature was essentially frank, truthful, noble, and some subtle instinct warned her that the false Miss Bermingham was secret, artful and an adept in dissimulation. She blamed herself for her opinion of the impostor;

she tried to like her ; but still her distrust of the girl grew upon her with every day and hour. She was too generous to impart this opinion to another, and endeavored to return the overtures of the usurper with warmth and interest.

Towards evening of the second day, the false Miss Bermyngham grew restless and uneasy. She went up late to dress for dinner and returned to the drawing-room in a very brief space of time. She wandered frequently to the windows, watching the drive, and seemed abstracted and ill at ease.

But, contrary to her expectations, Colonel Brand did not make his appearance at Folliott Court that evening.

During the next day, the impostor was very gay and very affectionate in her manner to Beatrix, who reproached herself for her distrust of Lady Folliott's supposed niece and endeavored to atone for it by an answering warmth of manner.

They rode together in the morning, attended by Sir Lionel Charlton. After luncheon they walked in the park, received calls, and practiced music. Then Beatrix strolled into the conservatory, and soon after Sir Lionel followed her, leaving Lady Folliott and her supposed niece together in the drawing-room.

"Beatrix is gone to gather flowers for her hair and corsage," remarked the baroness. "Go after her, Nerea, dear, and gather some for yourself. There are some delicious fragrant violets just in bloom, I see."

"I don't care for flowers to-day, Aunt Folliott," said the impostor, with a sidelong glance at the clock and another at the window—"at least for natural flowers—little, wilted things, not fit to be compared to French-made flowers ! I like artificial flowers best of all, except for bouquets."

Lady Folliott looked surprised, but she made no reply. It would have been hard to tell whether the girl were serious or not.

"I suppose that Beatrix and Sir Lionel would not care to have me follow them into the conservatory," said the false Miss Bermyngham, after a pause, betraying a decided jealousy and dissatisfaction.

"Nerea, darling—"

"Why do you speak so reproachfully, Aunt Folliott? Have I not told the truth? Can you not see, as I see, that Sir Lionel loves Beatrix?" cried the false Miss Bermyngham, her voice quivering. "And—and—after all that has been said—after your hopes and plans—after your endeavors to interest me in Sir Lionel—I feel—I feel—as if I had not been well treated!"

She put her lace-trimmed handkerchief to her eyes and gave a seemingly heart-broken little sob.

Lady Folliott was distressed.

She gathered the girl to her breast and exclaimed:

"My poor little niece! My poor Nerea! I am sure that I have done very wrong in planning and talking as I have done! I shall never forgive myself if my folly has wrecked your happiness. I am sure that Lion has only a passing fancy for Beatrix. It must be so. I wish—I wish she had never come here!"

"Then you don't like her, Aunt Folliott?"

"Yes, dear; in spite of my devotion to your interests; in spite of the fact that she interferes with the one darling scheme of my heart; in spite of the fact that she is the rival of my own niece, I can't help loving her! She is noble, lovely, winning, and beautiful. I admire and love her, yet I wish Lion had never brought her here."

"If she would only go away, I know that his heart would turn to me," whispered the girl, with pretended

shyness. "He is so chivalrous, you know, Aunt Folliott, and her distress appeals to him, and he likes to protect a girl so beautiful and friendless ; but if she were gone, I know that I could win him !"

She spoke in a tone of quiet assurance that impressed Lady Folliott.

"My dear child," she said, "we must not make speculations upon what might happen if Beatrix were gone from the Court. She is to remain here a year. I love her, and you also love her. Let us try to make her life happy, and, as for our own lives, perhaps all will come out right yet. We must hope for the best."

The girl uttered assent, and disengaged herself from Lady Folliott's embrace.

A minute or two later she stole quietly out of the drawing-room. Instead of going upstairs to dress, she crossed the great hall and went into the dim library. Here she ensconced herself in a recessed window, and set herself to watch the avenue with feverish impatience.

"Colonel Brand must be here to-night," she said to herself. "I dare not stay with Aunt Folliott longer, lest he be ushered in, and I betray my satisfaction at his arrival. He will surely be here directly. We shall see if Miss Beatrix Rohan remains here a year ! We shall see what effect her departure will have upon Sir Lionel Charlton. She will soon be removed from my path forever !"

While she thus waited, impatient and anxious, Beatrix returned to the drawing-room, a basket of flowers in her hand.

She was dressed in an iron-grey cashmere walking-suit, and wore a knot of blue ribbons at her throat. Her dusk-gray eyes were shining with a happy light. Her tawny hair, burnished like gold, was crimped and

wrinkled and waved, in picturesque fashion, above her low, broad forehead. She sat down in an easy-chair to arrange her flowers.

"Where is Lionel?" asked Lady Folliott, abruptly.

"He has gone into the park in search of wood-violets," answered Beatrix. "He knows a spot where they grow thickly."

The baroness studied the girl's rare and exquisite beauty with a growing tenderness for her. She believed that Beatrix, even if she loved Sir Lionel with all her soul, would refuse to marry him if she, Lady Folliott, were to express disapprobation of the alliance. She had dropped a hint upon the night of Beatrix's arrival of her hopes for the future of the young baronet. She made a sudden resolve now to set the matter before her guest in a still clearer light.

Beatrix, looking up, marked the agitated expression upon the face of her hostess.

"Are you ill, Lady Folliott?" she asked, quickly. "You look troubled."

"I am troubled, my dear," said the baroness frankly. "I am greatly troubled."

Beatrix looked her sympathy, but remained silent. Lady Folliott glanced toward the door of the conservatory. There was time enough to unburden her mind to Beatrix before Sir Lionel could return. Why should she not make a covert appeal to the generosity of Beatrix, and so secure the happiness of her niece and the success of her own schemes?

"I am troubled about Nerea," she said, after a brief pause. "My dear, I am afraid I have made a mistake which will prove fatal to her happiness—and to mine! She is a dear little trusting creature, made to be petted and loved. She is not strong and resolute like you, Beatrix. "I have been very unwise, I fear."

"How so, dear Lady Folliott?" asked Beatrice, gently, seeing that the baroness expected her to speak.

"My dear, I am reposing a great confidence in you, but I must answer your question. I trust my secret—and Nerea's—to your honor. It has been for years my hope to see Lionel and Nerea husband and wife. I have explained this to both of them. I have told both of them that in the event of their marriage my property should go to them at my death. If either of them declines the alliance, the one who so declines shall not have one penny of my property. Lionel is poor—his estates being heavily encumbered. I know that he is interested in Nerea—that she could win his love!"

"You think so?" said Beatrice, in a low tone, drooping her face over her flowers.

"I am sure of it. And now I must tell you why I am troubled. I have praised Lionel to Nerea so much, have told her so often of my hopes, that she—she is interested in him! If he should marry another," said Lady Folliott, and her face grew more than ever anxious, "I am convinced that Nerea would die!"

Beatrice was silent.

"I know that Lionel esteems you very highly, Beatrice," said the baroness, after a short silence. "The object of my communication to you is this. You will hold my confidence sacred, I know, and I ask you as a favor to use your influence with Lionel in a way to favor the interests of my poor niece. If the opportunity should ever arise, I beg you to advise him in such a manner that he will accede to my wishes and marry my poor Nerea, who loves him?"

Beatrice understood. Lady Folliott was not skilled in dissimulation. She could not hide her real meaning, even under indirect modes of expression.

It was some minutes before Beatrix could answer. She did not look up then when she said :

"I shall hold your confidence sacred, Lady Folliott. If—if an occasion ever arises when I can comply with your request, I will do so !"

The baroness bent over the girl and kissed her.

"God bless you, my dear child !" she said, with deep feeling. "I love you next to Lion and Nerea. You have made me very happy, Beatrix. Sometimes I fear that Nerea would die of a great disappointment ; she is too tender and clinging and delicate. I trust you, Beatrix."

The girl's heart swelled with a great and terrible pain.

She longed to be alone, if but for a moment. She feared lest she should lose her self-command under the very next address of Lady Folliott.

"I—I must get more flowers," she faltered, and sprang up, hastening to the conservatory.

Both the baroness and Beatrix had been too much absorbed in their conversation to heed the sound of wheels on the moat-bridge and the carriage-drive. Neither of them were conscious of the sounds of an arrival. But Beatrix had barely entered the conservatory, halting just within its wide portal, when the drawing-room door was opened and a servant ushered in a visitor, announcing in a loud voice :

"Colonel Brand !"



CHAPTER XXV.

AGAIN ADRIFT.

The announcement of the name of Colonel Brand reached the ears of Beatrix, as she halted within the door of the conservatory. The sound of that detested name was enough to drive from her mind all the anxieties crowding into it—all thought of Lady Folliott, or the false Miss Bermyngham, or even of Sir Lionel Charlton.

Colonel Brand here ! at Folliott Court !

The hunted girl gasped for breath, and leaned heavily against the door-post. And then the clear and silvery tones of Colonel Brand's voice, sleek and persuasive, penetrated to her concealment.

She comprehended that he was introducing himself to Lady Folliott ; that the baroness was responding to him coldly and haughtily ; and, then, he was entering upon the subject of his visit.

He had traced her to Folliott Court ! He had come to take her away from this safe refuge, these kind friends !

The basket of flowers fell from her grasp. The instinct of flight possessed her soul. She looked about her with a wild glance. A door opened into the wide hall at no great distance from her. The girl sped

down the green and fragrant aisle, through the door and the hall, up the stairs, to her own room.

Here she sank down in a chair, wild-eyed and panting.

The season was May, but, according to the custom of Folliott Court to which allusion has been made, a fire burned low and ruddily in the grate. Beatrix was strangely chilled. And so almost immediately, she arose from her seat near the door and crouched down upon the hearth-rug in the warmth of the glow and blaze and put out her white and quivering hands to the soft heat.

Her thoughts were all confused. A great terror possessed her. The memories of all the horrors she had endured from the hour of her escape from her prison chamber in the Chateau Valbeck crowded thickly into her mind. She looked about her with big, affrighted eyes, as if expecting to see her enemy enter her very presence.

But gradually she grew calmer. Her courage and self-possession returned to her. Her thoughts became cooler, quieter, more self-concentrated.

"He will not penetrate my chamber," she said to herself. "I am safe here for the present. But if, as I believe, he has power to take me away from this house, I shall not be safe here for many hours. I must resume my flight again. I must abandon this shelter, these friends. Ah, how did he trace me here?"

She arose and went into her dressing-room, intent upon preparations for her flight.

Among the articles she had ordered from London from Lady Folliott's dressmaker had been a large and well-appointed dressing-bag. Beatrix hastened to pack carefully into this a silk dress, and changes of linen of every description. The bag was then not too heavy to

carry, as she readily proved in transporting it into her parlor.

"I regret now having bought so much clothing," she thought. "Still, I have three hundred pounds remaining. I must husband that sum with the greatest care."

Her pocket-book was in her trunk. She took it out, examined its contents, and, leaving some twenty pounds within it, transferred all the remainder to a pocket she had sewed in her stays. Then she brought out a cashmere sacque like her costume, a round black straw-hat, trimmed with black velvet and daisies, and a shawl and gloves.

She was in the act of putting on her sacque when a low knock was heard upon her door, and Lady Folliott's maid entered, bearing a bunch of wood-violets on a small silver salver.

"With the compliments of Sir Lionel Charlton, Miss Clare," she said, delivering the flowers. "Sir Lionel just came in by the garden entrance, and I told him that you had gone up to dress for dinner and my lady had a visitor, so he gave these flowers to me to bring up to you and went directly to his own room."

The woman was rather garrulous in her speech, and her busy eyes noted the young lady's outer wrappings, but they did not observe the traveling-bag. With an idea that "Miss Clare" had been about to take a walk upon the terrace and wait there for her flowers, she made some remark upon the hour and offered to assist Beatrix as usual with her toilet.

"Thank you," said the girl, gently; "but I shall not need your services to-day. You need not come in again before dinner."

Slipping a sovereign into the woman's hand, she quietly dismissed her.

Left alone, Beatrix pressed the little bunch of fra-

grant violets to her lips. A sudden mist of tears obscured her eyes. Then she put the flowers in her bosom, and murmured :

“At least I may keep them, even if he is to marry Miss Bermyngham. I shall never see him again—never !”

And in these words she renounced all her secret dreams of love and happiness, and took up again her life of flight and desolation.

She was still standing pale and calm and strangely resolute, before the hearth, when a tapping was again heard upon her door, and Lady Folliott entered.

Her ladyship was flushed and agitated ; an angry sparkle burned in her blue eyes ; her countenance expressed an anxious determination. As she beheld Beatrix, her face softened into an expression of tenderness and affectionate sympathy.

Her gaze took in upon the instant the preparations Beatrix had made for departure.

“My dear child !” she exclaimed. “What are you doing ? You surely were not going away without my knowledge ?”

“Oh no,” replied Beatrix, with a strange weariness of voice and face. “I meant to send you a message at the very last moment. I did indeed, dear Lady Folliott. I could not go away without thanking you for all your goodness to me.”

“And not without seeing me and Nerea also, I hope, Beatrix,” said the baroness. “Poor Nerea ! she loves you dearly ; I dread the effect your loss will have upon her. She never had a sister, and I had hoped that you two would be as sisters to each other. She does not know of Colonel Brand’s presence in the house, nor does Lion. And now tell me dear, where were you thinking of going ?”

"I had not thought," replied the girl, desolately. "I am no longer safe here. I must go somewhere, but where I do not yet know. Is he—is Colonel Brand still in this house?"

"Yes, dear," said Lady Folliott, gravely. "He refuses to go away without you."

Beatrix did not tremble now, but the whiteness of her lovely young face, the desperate expression in her dark-gray eyes, touched Lady Folliott to the soul.

"Sit here on the sofa with me, Beatrix," said the lady, leading the girl to a low silken couch. "Colonel Brand is in the drawing-room below, as fierce as an unchained tiger, even though he seems as bland as a summer morning. But you are safe within this room. He would not dare penetrate to the private chambers of this house. He will stay he declares, until you come down to him."

"I will not see him!" cried Beatrix, her passionate young voice all a-quiver. "Oh, Lady Folliott, do not let him talk you over to his side as he persuaded Mr. Hillsley. He seems good and kind and honest, but he is base, wicked and treacherous. Think how he has persecuted me! how he shut me up in a prison-room at the Chateau Valbeck! Think of the hideous fate he has in store for me! Oh, do not give me up to him? Let me escape—now—while there is time!"

She sprang up, but Lady Folliott held her close in a firm yet gentle clasp.

"Beatrix, do you think I could betray you?" cried the baroness. "My dear child, listen to me. Be calm, dear. Do you think that Colonel Brand's specious seeming could deceive me? I believe him to be all that you have said, hypocritical, cruel, wicked and desperate. I would as soon give you up to a ravening wolf as to that man!"

Beatrix seized the hand of Lady Folliott and covered it with kisses.

"But," continued the baroness, touched by this outburst of gratitude, "I must not hide from you, dear Beatrix, my inability to protect you from him. He is your legal guardian. He is armed with a warrant for your arrest as a person of unsound mind, and as a minor who has fled from her rightful guardians. He has a policeman in waiting outside the door—"

Beatrix started; her face grew deathlier in its pallor.

"A warrant for my arrest? A policeman?" she whispered.

"Yes, Beatrix, the power is in his hands, and he does not scruple to use it. I have implored him in vain. He will not hearken to my entreaties. I cannot keep you here and bid defiance to him. The law is on his side."

"But could you not keep me here while you make application in my behalf to the orphans' court?" asked Beatrix, desperately. "Can you not also invoke the law?"

"My dear child, I have not power to keep you over night under my roof. And before I could invoke the aid of the law to your rescue, Colonel Brand would have removed you out of the country."

"Then you refuse to aid me? You give me up?"

"By no means. Beatrix, can you ask me that? I am persuaded that, in a recourse to law, Colonel Brand would have the advantage of us. He is your legal guardian, the husband of your father's sister, and has the reputation of being an honorable gentleman. He says that his wife is heartbroken upon your account. His manner and words would delude any judge or jury into believing him the noblest of God's creatures, and

you a rebellious, wayward, half-demented girl. And that is not all," continued Lady Folliott, her face flushing yet more deeply. "It seems that he has made inquiries about you at Folliott Fens, and he professes to think that Sir Lionel Charlton is your lover. I explained to him in vain my views in regard to Lion and Nerea. He continued in his belief that you and Lion are lovers, and he professed to regard your stay in the same house with Sir Lionel as indelicate. In short, my dear Beatrix, Colonel Brand has the power to take you away, and an open resistance to his authority will not result in your deliverance, but in a very unpleasant scandal."

"But you have said that you will not give me up to him!" cried the girl, anxiously.

"True. I will not. Yet, I cannot resist his demands. I cannot fight him openly. A recourse to the law would cause a delay that might prove fatal. Since, then, we cannot resort to open war, cannot make a bold resistance to him, we must try evasion. I dare not summon Sir Lionel to share in our councils, lest he do something hot-headed and rash, that shall provoke the scandal I desire to avoid. I am obliged, therefore, to rely upon my own judgment. You must leave the Court immediately, Beatrix!"

The girl arose, calm and resolute.

"I am ready," she said, briefly.

"I formed my plans while I was listening to Colonel Brand," said Lady Folliott. "Upon leaving the drawing-room, my first movement was to learn if he had really a policeman in waiting, as he had said. It was true. The man is pacing the terrace, with his eyes fixed upon the front door. If you were to decide to accompany Colonel Brand peacefully, this policeman would not be called in. He will be summoned only in case of your

and our resistance. But there the man is near the carriage-porch, and it has not seemed to occur to him, or to Colonel Brand, that this house has other means of exit. Having assured myself that the policeman is really there, I went to the dining-room and transmitted an order through the butler to have a carriage made ready in all secrecy and haste. It must be waiting now. Then I went up to my rooms and ordered Talcut, my maid, to prepare for a journey. She is doubtless ready by this time. Your boxes shall be sent after you, my dear, as soon as they can be sent safely. Talcut will not leave you until you are in safety. Have you messages to leave for Nerea and Lion? I will tell them the reason of your hasty departure. I trust the year of your minority will pass swiftly, and that when you are safely delivered from all your troubles you will return to Folliott Court as to your home."

Lady Folliott also arose now, and took both the girl's hands in her own.

"I thank you," answered Beatrix, simply. "You are very good, and I am very grateful. I beg that you will make my adieux to Miss Bermyngham and Sir Lionel Charlton."

"You have not asked where you are going, my dear," said Lady Folliott, trying to smile. "You have told me how friendless you are, and I shall venture to send you to a friend of my own, whose name is the first to occur to me in this emergency. She will treat you very kindly, and will watch over you as I would do. I think you would be safer with her than anywhere else in England. She is an elderly maiden lady, of limited income, somewhat eccentric, and leads a lonely life, with only two servants to look after her. She will be grateful for your companionship, and I think you will be happy with her."

"I shall be happy anywhere where I will be safe!"

"You will be safe with her, my dear. Talcut will tell you all about her as you travel. I have only time to say that you may trust my friend implicitly. She is a very distant relative of my own, a Scotchwoman by birth, but English by education, and she lives in Durham. Her name is Miss McTavish—Octavia McTavish. Talcut will take all possible precautions, so that Colonel Brand will not be able to trace you to her house. Will you go to Miss McTavish, my dear? I can promise you a hearty welcome from her!"

Beatrix had had some indistinct idea of seeking a refuge in Wales, having still in her possession that letter of recommendation to Mr. Trevor which had been given her by her traveling-companion, Mrs. Trevor; but she gladly acceded to the plan proposed by Lady Folliott.

"It is settled, then," said the baroness. "That is Talcut's step in the hall. It is time for you to go. Trust my maid fully, my dear. Let her manage everything for you. I have given her special instructions. Write to me often. And now good-by. God bless you and keep you, my dear child, and restore you safely to us!"

She embraced the girl with a mother's tenderness, gave some further counsel, and then opened the door leading into the hall. Talcut, the maid, an elderly, prim-looking woman, in traveling costume, was waiting outside.

"Is the way clear?" asked Lady Folliott.

"Yes, my lady," replied Talcut, in a whisper. "The gentleman below just sent up a message by the hall-porter bidding the young lady to hurry. I told James that I would deliver the message. James says that the

gentleman is walking the floor, and growing savager with every moment. He's been to the door—the gentleman has—to talk with his policeman !”

“There is no time to lose !” said Lady Folliott. “Come, Beatrix. We will go down to the carriage !”

She led the way almost silently across the great hall and nearly down its length, and then turned into a narrower corridor at right angles with it, Beatrix following, and Mrs. Talcut bringing up the rear with the young lady's dressing-bag and her own hand-bag.

The corridor opened into another hall parallel with the first, and a staircase led from this to a similar hall upon the lower floor. Lady Folliott hurried swiftly, gaining a door looking out upon the rear gardens. Thence she made her way to the stables, closely followed by the fugitive heiress and the maid.

The carriage was in readiness in the stable-yard. The coachman was upon the box, and a stableman stood at the carriage-door.

The baroness bestowed a final embrace upon Beatrix, who climbed into the vehicle. The maid followed.

“Drive out at the back of the stable-yard,” said Lady Folliott, in a low voice, addressing the coachman, “and over the back bridge of the moat. Take a circuitous route through the park, and drive carefully so as not to be heard from the house. You are not to go to Spalding, but to Bourn !”

The coachman signified that he understood, and touched up his horses, driving slowly out of the stable-yard by a rear-route.

Lady Folliott returned to the garden-door of the house, and, waiting there for a few minutes, listened intently.

She could barely hear the sound of the carriage-wheels on the moat-bridge. She waited until she was

quite sure that the carriage had entered the park, and then she returned to her own rooms.

She had scarcely entered them when a servant brought her an urgent written message from Colonel Brand, stating that he must see her and Miss Rohan without further delay.

Lady Folliott was holding the card in her hand, when Sir Lionel Charlton entered her presence.

"What is this I hear, Aunt Folliott?" he asked. "My valet tells me that there is a person below who has come for Miss Rohan—"

"It is Colonel Brand," replied the baroness, calmly. "He is armed with a warrant, Lion, and we cannot resist him. Hush, my dear boy, Beatrix is safe. Do you think I would give her up to her enemies? She is gone!"

And in a few words she told him of Beatrix's flight and destination.

"We must gain a little time," concluded Lady Folliott. "I shall detain Colonel Brand as long as possible. You must not see him, Lion. There must be no scene, no cause for scandal. Remain with Nerea in the library, and trust me to manage Beatrix's enemy!"

And with a calm smile on her handsome face, Lady Folliott slowly returned to the drawing-room and to her dangerous guest!



CHAPTER XXVI.

"ANN JONES" AGAIN.

Colonel Brand was walking to and fro the great drawing-room with quick, impetuous strides, and with a look of gathering suspicion darkening his face. He paused as the baroness entered and looked sharply beyond her, as if he expected to behold Beatrix.

"I must apologize for detaining you so long, sir," said Lady Folliott, with an icy politeness. "Pray resume your seat."

She swept towards the hearth as she spoke.

"Where is my niece—my ward?" demanded Colonel Brand, sharply, a sullen spark glowing in his small, black eyes. "Have you informed Beatrix that I am here, madam?"

"I have so informed her," replied the baroness, haughtily. "I told her also that you are armed with a warrant for her arrest, and that you have a policeman waiting outside to take her into custody if she defies your authority."

Colonel Brand's thin, dark face lighted up with sudden satisfaction ; his long, thin nose worked convulsively up and down, and he said, with a sinister delight expressed in every feature :

"I see that you understand me, madam. I am glad

you stated the case so plainly to my niece. I suppose she was greatly terrified—that she realized her helplessness—that she saw that her safety lay in complete submission to her relatives and guardians? Poor, unhappy, demented girl!" he added, sighing profoundly. "If you knew, Lady Folliott, the anxiety she has caused us—the sleepless nights she has given us—your heart would bleed for us. She is our niece. My wife has been more than a mother to her—yet how has she rewarded us!"

"But you say that she is demented," said Lady Folliott, drily. "One should not expect much of a demented person."

Colonel Brand shot a keen glance at the calm, impassive face of the baroness. Her blue eyes were regarding him with a cool and haughty gaze. A sudden uneasiness took possession of him.

"Why does not Beatrix make her appearance?" he demanded abruptly.

"I informed her of your intention of taking her away with you this very night," said the baroness, calmly. "I told her that you had a fly in waiting for her removal. You cannot expect that she will hasten down to you. You must have a little patience, sir. You must wait a little longer."

Colonel Brand turned on his heel and walked to one of the windows. Parting the curtains with his hand, he looked out. His ally, the policeman, was pacing the terrace slowly in the gathering gloom, and keeping a vigilant watch upon the mansion and the draw-bridge. Colonel Brand smiled and returned to Lady Folliott, who remained standing before the hearth.

"I had a momentary misgiving," he said, "but I see that it was the merest folly. I am not pleased with this detention, madam. Why am I obliged to wait so

long for the appearance of my niece? Is she at this moment indulging in an interview with her new lover, Sir Lionel Charlton?"

Lady Folliott's face flushed, but she answered calmly :

"Miss Rohan is not with my nephew, sir. She has not seen him since you came ; she will not see him this evening."

"Then she will never see him again," said Colonel Brand, resuming his pacing to and fro, while the baroness sank gracefully into an arm-chair. "That girl has caused me a world of trouble, madam. When my brother-in-law in dying begged me to be a father to his child, I little thought how onerous the charge would prove. Rebellious, willful, wayward and headstrong, she has caused me to feel the truth of that hackneyed quotation from Shakespeare : 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child !' "

Lady Folliott had drawn a little work-table to her side, and in the light of the two wax candles upon it had begun to busy herself with a piece of gay woolen embroidery. She looked up now from her work, saying quietly :

"But you say that her mind is unbalanced, sir. All things are pardoned in the insane, you know. If Miss Rohan is demented, as you affirm, she is certainly not to blame for her waywardness. She is to be pitied rather than blamed."

Colonel Brand bit his lips and continued his hurried walk to and fro. Lady Folliott calmly stitched at her embroidery. A long silence succeeded, during which Beatrix's enemy often paused to listen for the sounds of her approach.

The baroness's thoughts went out after the young

fugitive heiress, who was, with every instant, increasing the distance between herself and her pursuers.

"Beatrix has so much the start," said Lady Folliott to herself, with a glance at the pretty Sèvres clock, "that I need not detain Colonel Brand longer. She has been gone over an hour. Talcut is very shrewd, and I have given her permission to use her own judgment in conducting this flight, and to change the plan of travel I had formed for any better one which she and Beatrix might decide upon. If they find themselves pursued they can alter their course, can travel by post-chaise, can spend a week in their journey to Durham. I can trust Talcut. Beatrix is absolutely safe with her, so I may as well dismiss Colonel Brand."

She looked up, meeting her visitor's gaze fixed full upon her. Colonel Brand was about to speak, but he refrained, as the butler entered and announced that dinner waited.

The baroness arose, putting aside her work.

"I must beg you to excuse me, sir," she said, coolly.

Colonel Brand flushed hotly, and his eyes burned with ill-suppressed fury.

"Certainly, madam," he said, hoarsely; "but I must see my niece at once. If she does not come to me within five minutes, I shall be compelled to summon my ally and seek her room. You understand?"

"I am sure that you can have no authority to search my house," said Lady Folliott, calmly, "and I shall certainly resist any such attempt upon your part. I am tempted to summon my servants and have you put out of doors. Were it not for the scandal such action might provoke, I should have done so before this."

"Ah, yes. It was well that you had a timely regard for yourself and your family," sneered Colonel Brand.

"I am impatient to depart. How soon will my niece make her appearance in this room?"

"Well," said the baroness, quietly, "I should say in about one year!"

Colonel Brand started back in amazement.

"Madam!" he ejaculated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said the lady, blandly, "that Miss Rohan will not consider herself safe here during her minority, and that, therefore, she will not return until she is become her own mistress."

"Return! She is gone, then?"

"Certainly, sir. Did you suppose that she would remain here to be marched away under the convoy of a policeman?"

Colonel Brand gave utterance to a fearful oath. His face grew startingly white and haggard. His long nose worked with a fiercer convulsiveness. The baroness recoiled before the frightful malignancy of his stare.

"Am I to understand," he asked, "that Beatrix has fled from your house since I came into it?"

"Such is the case, sir. Did you suppose I would give her up to you, whatever your claims? I was not able to defy your authority; I shrank from creating a scene; therefore, I sent Miss Rohan away secretly to a place of absolute security," said Lady Folliott pleasantly. "She had departed before I returned to you. I have detained you more than an hour, but she is safe now and I need not detain you longer. Permit me to wish you a good-evening."

Colonel Brand poured forth a volley of oaths horrifying to hear. Lady Folliott moved haughtily towards the door.

"One word, madam," cried the visitor, following her. "You have outwitted me for the time being, but I advise you not to count too much upon the safety of

Beatrice. I swear to discover her in time for my purposes, and that your treatment of me shall be amply revenged upon her !”

Colonel Brand caught up his hat, drew it down over his forehead, rushed past the baroness, and dashed through the hall and out of doors.

Lady Folliott, with a smile, took her way to the dining-room, where Sir Lionel Charlton awaited her.

Colonel Brand could not for an instant doubt that the baroness had told him the truth—that Beatrice had departed for a place of safety. Wild with rage, he sped down the terrace, joining his ally, who was slowly walking back and forth, quietly smoking a pipe.

“What’s up, Colonel?” inquired the policeman, astonished at the impetuous appearance of his employer. “Does the young lady resist? Am I to take her into custody?”

He emptied his pipe of its contents while speaking and was ready for action.

“She’s gone !” fairly shouted Brand, prefacing his declaration with maledictions. “Gone, do you hear? Escaped ! Fled ! A pretty watch you’ve kept ! She has escaped before your very eyes !”

“Impossible ! I have watched the grounds and the bridge with the eyes of a hawk. She’s in the house, Colonel. They are trying to get rid of you—”

“That’s all you know of people like Lady Folliott. It is impossible that she should lie. I don’t believe she would lie to save her life !” cried Colonel Brand. “She’s one of your high-bred, proud, punctilious people, who look upon a lie as degrading. Besides, I read her very soul in her eyes. She said that she had sent my niece away, and I believe her.”

“If she sent the young lady away, she did not send her on foot and alone, Colonel,” said the officer,

astutely. "There must be other bridges over the moat. We had better visit the stables and discover what is known there."

The two men hurried around the mansion, through the shrubberies and gardens, to the stables.

In the stable-yard they found two or three men busily employed. Accosting one of them, and drawing him aside, Colonel Brand exhibited to him a sovereign, and said :

"Here, my good fellow, this is to be yours if you answer a few questions: Are all your horses and carriages in the stable?"

"My lady won't like me to talk to strangers," said the man, eyeing the gold piece greedily, yet keeping a rein upon his tongue.

"You had better answer," said the officer, admonishingly. "I am a policeman. We are armed with a warrant. If you tell all you know, this gentleman will give you the sovereign he's holding up to you. If you refuse to tell, you refuse at your peril!"

This address reduced the hostler to terms.

"I'll tell all I know," he said, in a low voice, looking askance at his fellow-stablemen. "It isn't much, the Lord knows. The pair of blacks and the close carriage are gone—have been gone near two hours!"

"And who went with them?" asked Colonel Brand.

"Martin drove," said the fellow sullenly. "My lady's maid, Talcut, and my lady's guest, Miss Clare, went inside. My lady come out to the stable-yard to see them off."

"Which way did they go?"

"Across the bridge yonder through the park."

"And where were they going? Do you know their intended destination?"

"Yes, sir. They were going to Spalding to catch the

first train," said the man, deliberately lying, justifying himself in his own mind with the thought that he didn't intend to lose a good place, or risk offending a kind and liberal mistress for the sake of two unknown persons.

"And they have been gone two hours!" cried Colonel Brand. "They are on their way in the railway train. Did you overhear anything about their final destination, fellow?"

"No, sir—not a word!"

Colonel Brand flung the sovereign upon the ground and turned away abruptly, followed by his ally. They hurried around to the carriage-porch of the mansion in a dead silence. Their fly was in waiting for them; the driver on the box. Colonel Brand sprang into the vehicle, the policeman following, and gave the order sternly and tersely:

"To Spalding! And don't spare the horses! We must make the distance in an hour!"

The vehicle rolled rapidly down the drive, crossed the draw-bridge, and passed out at the lodge-gates.

The highway bordered the Folliott Park for some distance. As the fly came abreast a small gate in the park palings, Colonel Brand saw that the gate was open, and that a small girlish figure, wrapped closely in long waterproof cloak and hood, was standing by it in the shadows.

Even as he saw her she sprang forward, stopped the vehicle by a peremptory gesture to the driver, and approached the carriage-door.

"Which is Colonel Brand?" she asked, in a tremulous yet silvery voice.

Colonel Brand answered by leaning out at the open window and proclaiming his identity.

"Here is a letter for you," said the woman, handing up a sealed envelope.

Colonel Brand noticed that her hand was white and plentifully adorned with jewels. He took the letter mechanically, and she turned and hurried into the park, a rustling of silken drapery attending her movements. Colonel Brand heard the park-gate close and the bolt shoot into the lock.

"Here's a mystery," he said. "I wish I could have seen her face. She is a lady evidently, and not a servant. Is this a parting message from Lady Folliott? Let me see!"

The lamps outside the vehicle had been lighted, but their faint illumination did not serve the occupants of the interior.

Colonel Brand drew from his pocket a box of wax vestas, lighted one, tore open the letter, and read as follows:

"DEER SUR: Miss Rohan has gon, but i shal find meens to lett you no whare she is as soon as i find out miself. Look for a leter from me at the same address as before in a da or to. i shall bee sure to rite.

"ANN JONES."

There was an odd and sinister smile upon Colonel Brand's countenance as he folded this missive and put it in his pocket.

"I understand!" he said to himself. "'Ann Jones' is the nom-de-plume of some enemy of Beatrix. The unique spelling, and the common name appended, are a clever device to cover the identity of the writer. And that writer is a lady who desired to keep herself well concealed. She hates Beatrix with a deadly enmity. I shall hear from her again. But I shall not wait for her

to spy out Beatrice's whereabouts. I shall search for myself. But with a traitor in Lady Folliott's own household, and with a sleuth-hound like me upon her track, Beatrice will not long escape me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MISS MCTAVISH.

The carriage containing the fugitive Beatrice and Lady Folliott's maid, Mrs. Talcott, proceeded at a rapid rate of speed through Folliott Park and turned into the highway at its further side. It was not yet dusk, but the long English twilight was slowly gathering over the landscape. The road was lonely and shut in by tall hedges. For miles no house was visible by the roadside, and they met no traveler or laborer.

Beatrice, with her face pressed against the window at the back of the carriage, watched with burning eyes for some glimpse of pursuers until the deepening shadows interposed like a veil, and made even near objects indistinct. Then, with a growing sense of security and increasing hope and courage, she drew down the silken curtain and nestled comfortably among the carriage cushions.

"There is nothing now to fear, Miss Clare," said Mrs. Talcott, who occupied the opposite seat, with her back to the horses. "My lady will keep your guardian at the Court as long as possible. I dare say we shall be at Bourne and seated in a railway-coach before Colonel Brand even learns that you have given him the slip. My lady is clever. You can safely trust everything to her."

It was a long drive to Bourne, and a good portion of it lay upon rude and narrow roads beside open drains, through the dreary level fens. No fences or hedges hemmed in these roads, and they seemed not wide enough for two vehicles abreast. The coachman lighted his carriage-lamps, and kept a vigilant lookout upon both sides of the narrow way. Beatrix looked out now and then, seeing spectral-looking windmills in the distance, and occasionally a shadowy farm-house with its range of outbuildings.

"It is a dreary outlook, Miss Clare," remarked the maid, in her subdued, respectful voice. "A little carelessness on the part of our coachman might overset the carriage into one of those ditches and cost us our lives. But Martin is a safe driver. He'll get us to Bourne in safety. He is never careless. How pale you are, Miss! My lady had a hamper of provisions put into the carriage, knowing that it was near dinner-time and you would need food, and knowing, too, that you would not have time to dine at Bourne. We hope to catch a mail, whether down or up makes little difference. Let me open the hamper, Miss."

Taking permission for granted, and being prompted, without doubt, by the cravings of her own appetite, Mrs. Talcut drew from beneath the seat she occupied, a small square hamper. Upon being opened, the hamper was found to contain a cold fowl, sandwiches, freshly-plucked hot-house grapes, and a bottle of port wine.

"The housekeeper packed the hamper herself, and in no time at all, as you may say," remarked Talcut, producing napkin, plate, knife, fork, and glass goblet. "Let me serve you, Miss. You must eat to keep up your strength, you know. We've a long journey before us, and you will need all your strength."

Thus adjured, Beatrix eat her supper, and afterward,

at her request. Mrs. Talcut consumed a large portion of what remained.

When the hamper, with the fragments of the feast, had been stowed away again under the seat, Beatrice resumed her lounging position among the cushions, and was very thoughtful and silent throughout the remainder of the drive.

They arrived at Bourne safely, and drew up before the railway station soon after eight o'clock. The carriage set out immediately upon its return to Folliott Court. Beatrice and her attendant entered the station, Miss Rohan taking care to veil her face. Talcut hastened to the booking-office.

"Miss Clare," she whispered, returning to her young charge, "the up-train has been gone half-an-hour. The down-train is due in ten minutes. If we intend to go by the up-mail we shall have to wait until morning, and then we may be overtaken, you know. What shall we do?"

"The down-train is the London mail, I suppose," said Beatrice. "I shall feel safer to be going in some direction. I cannot remain at Bourne until morning. I should tremble at every sound. Procure tickets for London, Mrs. Talcut, and let us take the down-train."

The servant-woman obeyed, procuring tickets as desired.

Fifteen minutes later, the fugitive heiress and Mrs. Talcut were speeding toward London in the night-mail.

They had a first-class compartment to themselves, and Beatrice threw back her veil with a sigh of relief, and stared out of the windows into the darkening night with great, solemn, desolate eyes, whose expression half-frightened her companion.

"You are very tired, Miss Clare," said Mrs. Talcut,

compassionately. "All this excitement has been too much for you. I've been thinking it would be foolish for us to go on to London. Colonel Brand will telegraph to the London terminus, of course, on the mere suspicion that we will go to London."

Beatrix turned her gaze upon her attendant.

"That idea had already occurred to me," said the girl. "But what are we to do?"

"Our route to London is by way of Stamford, Peterborough, and Huntingdon," said Mrs. Talcut, thoughtfully. "We must step off at one of those places. Not at Stamford—that is too near. But at Peterborough, I should say. I have an acquaintance at Peterborough. In fact, my own cousin keeps a lodging-house there and would gladly take us in for the night. In the morning we can take all possible precaution and resume our journey to Durham."

This plan commended itself to Beatrix and she hastened to assent to it.

"If we had caught the up-mail," said Mrs. Talcut, "we should have taken it, and Colonel Brand might perhaps have traced us easily to our destination. But chance has favored us more than we could have favored ourselves. I am very sure that he will never trace this night's wanderings."

At Stamford an elderly gentleman was ushered into their compartment, despite Mrs. Talcut's remonstrances with the guard, and her whispered offer to the functionary of a shilling if the elderly gentleman could be bestowed elsewhere.

"Impossible, ma'am," the guard answered, regretfully. "The gentleman's only going to Peterborough. The train is unusually full and we are obliged to put him in with you. It will be a short run through, ma'am, and then you'll be left to yourself."

The journey to Peterborough was performed by Beatrice in a dead silence. She kept her face veiled, and nestled in her corner seeming asleep. The elderly gentleman looked from the opposite window. He was somewhat infirm, and completely occupied with himself, and scarcely bestowed a glance upon his fellow-travelers.

As the train steamed into the Peterborough station, the elderly gentleman became eager and impatient, and the coach had scarcely come to a stop when he produced a key, unlocked the coach-door and slipped out upon the platform.

"What a lucky chance!" cried Mrs. Talcut, snatching up the traveling-bags. "That is a blessed custom the gentlemen have got into of carrying their own keys to railway carriages. Come, Miss Clare. Let us get away before the guard comes."

Beatrice followed her attendant, descending to the platform, and hurrying away into the shadows.

"We don't want a cab," said Mrs. Talcut. "My cousin lives very near. It's not three minutes' walk."

This information proved strictly accurate. A brisk walk of three minutes brought them to a quiet brick house in a quiet respectable-looking street. It was but little after ten o'clock, and a light was burning in the little parlor overlooking the street. Mrs. Talcut knocked loudly and peremptorily.

It was her cousin herself—a large, red-faced, good-natured looking woman—who opened the door and gave them admittance.

Mrs. Talcut's story was soon told, and she, with her fugitive charge, were made heartily welcome.

Certain temporary vacancies fortunately existing in the lodging-house, a pleasant front chamber was

assigned to Miss Rohan, and a smaller room adjoining was placed at the disposal of her attendant.

A light hot supper was prepared for the travelers, and soon after eleven o'clock Beatrix retired to her room and to bed.

When she awakened in the morning, Mrs. Talcut was in her room, and in readiness to assist at her toilet. When this had been completed they descended to the little private parlor of their hostess.

Here a luxurious breakfast was placed before Beatrix, who was waited upon by Mrs. Talcut.

"I had my breakfast an hour ago," said Lady Folliott's maid. "You were sleeping so soundly, Miss Clare, that I would not arouse you at your usual hour. You look refreshed by your long sleep."

"I am thoroughly rested, thank you, Talcut," said Beatrix, smiling. "I am anxious to resume our journey. What train are we to take?"

"I think we ought not to go by train, Miss," replied Mrs. Talcut. "My cousin's son is in the livery business, and he says he will drive us in a close carriage to Oakham, arriving there in time to catch a train for Leicester. We can then go on to Durham by a roundabout course. Will this be agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly. I am quite sure that Colonel Brand will never be able to trace our wanderings. You are very clever, Mrs. Talcut."

The serving-woman accepted this compliment with becoming modesty, but with visible gratification.

As soon as Beatrix had concluded her breakfast, a close carriage was brought to the door, and the fugitives set out for Oakham.

They arrived at their destination in time to catch a parliamentary train to Leicester. Beatrix decided that it was better to be traveling, even at a snail's pace, than

to remain at Oakham, and Mrs. Talcut agreed with her.

At Leicester they waited an hour for a mail-train, and continued their journey, arriving at Leeds at an early hour of the evening.

They proceeded to a quiet out-of-the-way hotel in Leeds, which was well known to Mrs. Talcut, and there spent the night.

The next morning they took train for Durham, which they reached safely and without incident.

"We have reached our journey's end," said Mrs. Talcut, cheerfully, as they emerged from the station. "A little drive will bring us to Bruce Cottage, Miss McTavish's place. And then, Miss Clare, you will feel indeed safe."

Beatrix's heart sank as they entered the cab and drove through the streets of the imposing, picturesque city. She had no thoughts for the castle or cathedral, for the hanging gardens, or the river Wear. Her mind was busy with Miss McTavish, and her probable reception.

"I wish we had sent on Lady Folliott's letter direct by post," the girl said suddenly, "instead of bringing it ourselves. It is not pleasant to take Miss McTavish by storm."

"Miss McTavish will be glad to see you, whether you come announced or unannounced, Miss Clare," said Mrs. Talcut. "She is my lady's relation, and under great obligations to my lady, to whom she is greatly attached. Why, half her income is an annuity which my lady bought for her, though I ought not to tell you that. Rest assured, Miss Clare, that Miss McTavish will make you very welcome."

The "little drive" which Mrs. Talcut had promised



A STRANGE GASPING CRY BROKE FROM HER LIPS.—See Page 271.

was lengthened into a journey of fifteen minutes duration.

They traversed various city streets, crossed a bridge, and presently struck out in the direction of the open country, following the course of the river.

They pursued the highway for a certain distance, until the houses had become few and scattered, and then turned into a lonely green lane leading down to the river.

At the bottom of this lane, quite near to the river bank, a small brick cottage stood in its own garden, embowered in trees. A high brick wall separated its domain from the lane. Its grounds sloped to the river's edge, and Beatrix discovered a little later that a small wooden pier, a small boat-house, and a boat or two, were among the attractions of the river-front.

The cab halted before a narrow green door in the high garden wall, and the cabman alighted and pulled the bell.

"This is Bruce Cottage," he said, returning to open the door of the vehicle. "I hear some one coming."

Beatrix descended, and Mrs. Talcut followed her. As they paused before the garden door, they heard steps upon the graveled walk within, and almost immediately the sound of the rattling of bolts and chains ensued, and the door swung slowly inward.

An old man, bowed and decrepit, with grizzled hair and strongly-marked features—a Scotsman evidently—appeared in the opening, and demanded what was wanted.

But even as he asked, in very broad Scotch, he recognized Mrs. Talcut, and made way for her and her young charge.

The cabman was dismissed; the old Scotsman took

possession of the traveling-bags, secured the gate, and led the way up the walk to the cottage.

And now Beatrix noticed the little river-pier, the boat-house and the boats. She looked curiously, too, at the dwelling and grounds. Since Lady Folliott intended this place to be her asylum for a whole year, she regarded it with keen and lively curiosity.

The cottage was low and of moderate size, with casement windows and a quaint vine-draped porch. A bow-window opened directly upon a green lawn, in which were set great beds of flowers. The entire aspect of Bruce Cottage and its surroundings was one of refinement and comfort bordering upon luxury.

Here Miss McTavish lived with two or three old attached family servants, in a style befitting a gentlewoman of moderate income, of hospitable habits, and of luxurious tastes.

The Scotsman ushered Beatrix and her attendant through the porch, through a pretty little tile-paved hall, into a small parlor. Here he left them to themselves, while he proceeded to inform his mistress of their arrival, taking with him the letter which Lady Folliott had addressed to Miss McTavish, commending Beatrix to her affectionate care.

The parlor had a casement window at its end, and a bow-window at its side overlooking the lawn and flower-beds. A pair of folding doors separated it from another tiny parlor, its exact counterpart. It was furnished with low, softly-cushioned chairs, broad, yielding sofas, tempting fauteuils, and Moorish cushions, all covered with crimson reps. The carpet was crimson also, as were the window-hangings. A few excellent engravings and one or two choice paintings hung upon the gray-tinted walls. A crimson-draped bracket or two upheld a miniature marble bust. In the inner parlor

was a cottage piano. The rooms seemed habitually used, for an open book lay upon a table by one window, and in the bow-window an easy-chair and hassock, and a wicker work-stand heaped with some dainty sort of embroidery and gaily-colored wools seemed to have been that instant deserted.

Beatrix sat down. Mrs. Talcut remained standing in a respectful attitude near the door.

"Miss McTavish is a long time in coming," said Beatrix presently, with a look of uneasiness.

"She'll be here directly, Miss," replied Mrs. Talcut, in a whisper. "I hope you'll like her, Miss Clare. She is odd, but she is a real lady and will be a friend to one of Lady Folliott's friends."

The maid had scarcely given this assurance when the sounds of feminine approach were heard in the hall without, and Miss McTavish, in a rustling silk gown and with clattering boot-heels, entered the parlor.

Beatrix had expected to behold a tall, large Scots-woman, with sandy hair and rugged features. She saw instead, as she rose up, a very small old woman, with white hair drawn smoothly away from her sunken temples, a delicate little face, reminding one of a withered apple, and a shriveled little figure, clad in silk, as we have said, and closely enfolded in a cashmere shawl.

The expression of Miss McTavish's face was kindly but querulous. She was one of those unfortunate beings made up entirely of sensitive nerves. She liked company, but noise and confusion worried her. In the place of great troubles, of which she had had but few in the course of her life, she made the most of small annoyances. Kindly, social, generous, and good-hearted, she was yet unconsciously selfish, and easily

troubled. Her first thought in all matters was of their effect upon her health.

Such was Miss Octavia McTavish—or Miss Tavy McTavish, as she was generally called by her hosts of acquaintances and friends who liked to throng to her pretty, orderly house.

She came up to Beatrix with both her thin hands extended and with a bright smile upon her sallow face.

“Welcome, my dear Miss Clare,” she exclaimed, in a little thin, high voice. “Lady Folliott has commended you to my tenderest care. You are welcome for Lady Folliott’s sake and for your own !”

Beatrix flushed under the warmth of her reception, and gave one of her hands into Miss McTavish’s keeping. But that lady, who was of a gushing nature, despite her years, turned up her face in a bird-like fashion and proffered a kiss, which Beatrix hastened to receive and return.

“Lady Folliott tells me that you have a very romantic story,” said Miss McTavish. “I dote upon romance. You must tell me all about yourself, my dear Miss Clare—not now, of course, but as soon as you become rested. You look tired, and I shall send you up to your room at once to rest. You are to remain with me a whole year, my dear, you know, so we have time enough before us. You did not come alone ?”

“No, madam ; Mrs. Talcut took charge of me.”

Miss McTavish wheeled about abruptly, confronting the maid, who very stiff and very grim, was still standing near the door.

“Ah !” said Miss McTavish, in a tone of recognition. “How do, Talcut ? Glad to see you. You left my lady well, I hope ?”

"Very well, thank you, Miss McTavish," was the reply.

Miss McTavish pulled a crimson bell-cord close at hand. A burly Scotswoman, the lady's housekeeper, answered the summons.

"Saunders," said the little old lady, with a grand air, "is the guest-chamber in readiness for occupancy?"

"Yes, my leddy. It was fresh-aired and made up the day," answered Saunders.

"Show this young lady—Miss Clare—to it, then, Saunders, and give the room adjoining to Mrs. Talcut," commanded Miss McTavish. "I will come to your door an hour hence, my dear Miss Clare. In the meantime, try to get some rest."

She dismissed Beatrix with an airy kiss. As the girl followed the housekeeper upstairs, she thought within herself :

"This will be a safe refuge if Colonel Brand does not find me out. But once let him get upon my track, once let him command Miss McTavish to give me up into his custody, and I should find her a broken reed indeed to lean upon !"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGER FROM INDIA.

The return of Colonel Brand, with the policeman, his ally, to Spalding, was accomplished within an hour after quitting the precincts of Folliott Court. They proceeded direct to the railway-station.

Their eager inquiries speedily elicited the fact that a train had just quitted the station, but the station-master,

the porters, and other officials declared that no passenger had embarked who bore a resemblance to the fugitive Miss Rohan.

Colonel Brand and his assistant withdrew to a little distance for private consultation.

"She must have been disguised," said the former. "We must get a description of every person who procured a ticket at the booking-office within the past hour."

"That will do no good, sir," replied the policeman, shrewdly. "My lady is too sharp to send Miss Rohan direct to the station, so that you can trace her out without trouble. No, Colonel. Miss Rohan and her maid did not come to Spalding."

The officer spoke with an air of assurance that impressed his employer.

"Then where the duce did they go?" demanded the colonel. "And why didn't you arrive at that conviction before?"

"It is quite clear to me now that they didn't come here," said the officer, meditatively. "Our time is not altogether lost since we have learned that fact, although we have given the fugitives so much greater start of us. Lady Folliott is keen as a brier. She might have sent Miss Rohan out on a drive, to remain out until your departure, and the young lady may be dining at Folliott Court at this moment as comfortable as you please. But that's not likely. A warrant looks an ugly thing to a lady. I am sure my lady has sent your ward away to some friend of her own, Colonel."

"One does not require to be very astute to see that," snarled Colonel Brand. "But where is the residence of that friend? Within a few miles of Folliott Court, or at a distance?"

"At a distance, I should say," declared the officer

astutely. "My lady will expect you to haunt this neighborhood for the present, and she would not consider Miss Rohan safe here. I should say that our next step would be to visit Bourne. We may get track of the fugitives at the Bourne railway-station."

This idea impressed Colonel Brand favorably. Inaction was terrible to him. He hastened to make inquiries in regard to the departure of trains, and finding that no train would leave Spalding before the following morning, announced his intention of proceeding by post-chaise.

The officer acceded to this plan. The fly, which was still in waiting, was dismissed. A carriage, with fresh horses and a driver who knew the roads well, was obtained, and Colonel Brand and his assistant departed in hot haste for Bourne.

It was after ten o'clock when they drove up to the railway station at Bourne. Colonel Brand dashed into the building, followed by his assistant. There were no loungers at this hour. The lights were dim; the station-master and porters looked sleepy. The business of the day was over, and the officials were preparing to return to their homes.

"Five minutes later, and we should have found no one here," said Colonel Brand. "We are fortunate in our arrival."

He accosted the station-master, and succeeded also in finding the ticket agent, who yet lingered about the station.

A brief interview with these men promptly sufficed to convince Colonel Brand that Beatrix and Mrs. Talcut had departed in a train from that very station at an earlier hour of that same evening.

"We are all right," he declared, in an aside, to the policeman. "This veiled young lady, slender, graceful

and shrinking, is my niece, of course. The elderly woman is Lady Folliott's maid. They are gone to London. I shall telegraph at once to the London terminus to have them stopped upon their arrival there. They shall find that I am too sharp for them."

Accordingly, Colonel Brand telegraphed directly to London, and then, well-pleased with his measure of success, and having learned that nothing further could be done until morning, he retired to the Angel Hotel, with his assistant, and procured quarters for the night.

The next morning, sending the policeman back to Spalding in the post-chase, with a liberal fee [and with minute directions to keep a close watch upon the movements of Sir Lionel Charlton, should the young baronet depart from the Spalding station, Colonel Brand departed by the first mail-train for London.

He expected to find his fugitive niece in close custody awaiting his arrival. To his utter amazement and disappointment, she was not anywhere to be found, she had not arrived at the London terminus, and he could learn nothing as to her whereabouts.

The only course open to him was to retrace his route, step by step, to Bourne, and ascertain at what station Beatrix and her attendant had left the train.

This course he hastened to take, but the task was more difficult than he had imagined. His efforts, in fact, resulted in total failure.

He found, indeed, the guard who had attended the train the night of Beatrix's journey. This guard acknowledged seeing the young lady and her attendant. He recalled the circumstance of the elderly gentleman's debarkation at Peterborough, and the fact that the elderly gentleman had let himself out with his own private key upon arriving at his destination. But the guard did not see Beatrix alight, and had not gone near

the carriage until its arrival at the London terminus, the young lady's attendant having at the commencement of her journey made a request to be left entirely undisturbed.

"The old woman must have had a key and let herself out unseen," remarked Colonel Brand in dismay. "I must visit every town at which the train stopped and make inquiries."

He began his search at Peterborough, visiting the hotels, inns, and even lodging-houses. He obtained not the faintest clue to the fugitives. No one had seen the persons he described at Peterborough, and he reluctantly departed to the next station upon the line.

For a week Colonel Brand worked indefatigably, but without a glimmer of success. Thanks to Mrs. Talcut's shrewdness, the fugitives had completely eluded him.

Thoroughly alarmed and chagrined, he returned to Spalding and had an interview with his aid, the police officer. Sir Lionel Charlton had not quitted Folliott Court, but Mrs. Talcut had returned to it and her railway ticket had been from London direct.

With this piece of information, Colonel Brand went back to London.

He half expected to find waiting for him another communication from the mysterious "Ann Jones," betraying the refuge of Beatrix, but in this he was disappointed.

"I shall hear from my unknown correspondent very soon, I am quite sure," he said to himself. "Beatrix is doubtless in London. I will continue my search, but I am persuaded that my illiterate and mysterious friend who wears silk gowns and jewels will presently come to my relief. Patience ! Patience !"

Convinced that Beatrix had not quitted England, and desiring aid in his search, he telegraphed to his wife

and son to join him. Upon the second day thereafter they were with him, bringing their keen, trained wits and unscrupulous natures to his assistance.

Meanwhile, at Folliott Court all had not gone on to the satisfaction of the false Miss Bermyngham. Regarding Beatrix as a dangerous rival, and desiring above all things to betray the young fugitive to her enemies, the impostor found herself utterly powerless from the want of the knowledge of Beatrix's refuge.

Upon the very night of Miss Rohan's abrupt and secret departure, Lady Folliott was taken ill with a low, nervous fever, which had been for some days impending, and which compelled her to remain in bed for the next fortnight.

The housekeeper, during Talcut's absence, was kept in close attendance upon the baroness. The false Miss Bermyngham was permitted to visit her ladyship, but the physician having enjoined quiet upon his patient, and the patient herself avoiding all wearying subjects, and making no allusions whatever to Beatrix, the impostor made her visits as brief as possible, and determined to gain the information she desired from other sources.

When Mrs. Talcut returned, after an absence of four or five days, the false Miss Bermyngham laid siege to her, but the lady's-maid was grim and reticent, and kept her own counsel despite all the blandishments of the supposed Indian heiress.

Thus repulsed, the schemer turned her attention to Sir Lionel Charlton.

But the young baronet divided his time, for the most part, between Lady Folliott's chamber and rambles out of doors. He spent only his evenings in the drawing-room with the impostor. He was uniformly courteous to her; he seemed to like her; but still his manner to

her did not differ from his manner to other young ladies. The false Miss Bermyngham was filled with a jealous bitterness and hatred of her rival.

"I might have won him before this but for her," she thought. "If Colonel Brand would only carry her away to some secret place and force her into a marriage with his son, all would be well. Once Sir Lionel finds that he cannot win Beatrix, he will agree to his aunt's wishes and offer himself to me. If I only knew where the girl is!"

She could not put the question point-blank to Sir Lionel Charlton. In case Beatrix were again found by her guardian, suspicions of treachery might be awakened. She must take good care that those suspicions should not be directed against her.

It was hard to possess her soul in patience, yet a fortnight passed and she had given no sign of the eager, envious passions consuming her.

Still another week went by, and Lady Folliott came down stairs, and took her place at the table and in the family carriage, and received visitors, but still her ladyship remained reticent upon the subject of Beatrix.

This reticence was not, however, due to distrust. The baroness had received two letters from Beatrix, post-marked London, Miss McTavish having sent them to a friend of her own in town to be posted, and these letters had breathed a sense of security and content, which had greatly pleased their recipient. As her interview with Colonel Brand had been excessively annoying to her, and as her championship of Beatrix's cause threatened further annoyance, Lady Folliott forebore to make a confidant of her niece, desiring to spare her all anxiety or trouble in the matter.

A month had passed since Beatrix's departure from Folliott Court. June, with its soft and balmy airs

blowing over the fens, its flowers and its radiance, was come.

One afternoon, Lady Folliott and her pretended niece went out for their usual drive. Sir Lionel Charlton had departed a day or two previous for London, to be absent a week, and there was, in consequence, a discontented and somewhat fretful expression upon the countenance of the impostor.

Yet she had not permitted Sir Lionel's absence to affect her devotion to her toilette. Dressed in a carriage-costume of *écru* silk trimmed with Chantilly lace, and wearing a coquettish black lace hat with *écru* ostrich plume and tea-roses, with a white, dotted veil over her pink-and-white face, she looked even more than usually pretty, and her conviction of this fact presently softened her mood to its wonted complacency.

Shading her face with a small *écru* parasol, covered with white lace, she said, in a childish, lisping voice, as the carriage-wheels rolled over the draw-bridge and passed out at the lodge-gates :

"Where do we go to-day, Aunt Folliott? Are we to make any visits?"

"No, my dear," replied the baroness. "I have a letter to post and a few purchases to make at the fancy-goods shop, and then we will go down by the Archendyke drain, and home again through Folliott Park. I am not equal to visiting to-day."

"A letter to post !" cried the false Miss Bermyngham, unable to conceal her eagerness. "Is it for Beatrix, dear Aunt Folliott?"

"Yes," answered the baroness. "My letter is for Beatrix."

Another question trembled upon the girl's lips, but she refrained from uttering it. She was very cautious

and guarded ; she would not betray her own intense interest in the whereabouts of Beatrix.

As Lady Folliott said nothing further concerning the young fugitive, the impostor became very silent. They drove swiftly along the pleasant country road and entered the chief street of Folliott Fens, drawing up before the general shop in which was situated also the post-office.

The baroness descended ; the false Miss Bermyngham followed her, her delicate silk trailing over the rude pavement. They entered the shop, and Lady Folliott proceeded to the fancy-goods counter.

"Your letter, Aunt Folliott?" said the girl. "Have you forgotten it? Let me post it for you, there's a darling!"

Lady Folliott opened a little shopping-bag which she carried and extracted from it a letter, which she gave into the girl's hands with a smile.

The impostor hastened to post it at the opposite side of the room, at the same time noting the address : "Miss Marcell, 44 Cravenhill Street, London, W."

She repeated the address to herself several times, impressing it upon her mind.

"I shall remember it," she thought. "I'll write to Colonel Brand to-night. Sir Lionel Charlton is in London. He is with her! I'll put an end to his visits to her in the course of a day or two."

She slowly returned to Lady Folliott, who desired her opinion upon some fancy-work. Throwing back her vail, the impostor examined flosses, silks and canvas with an air of discrimination and gave her verdict promptly.

"That is all, then," said Lady Folliott. "You may send the things out to the carriage, Mrs. Willicks."

The shop-woman hastened to obey. The baroness arose, and moved toward the door.

While the ladies had been thus occupied within the shop a man had come out of the inn over the way and approached a hostler who was pumping water industriously into a horse-trough.

The man first-mentioned was a great hulking ill-looking fellow, his face all seamed and scarred, and with only one eye. The eyelids closed tightly, almost concealing the loss of the other. The eye that remained to him was a peculiarly bold and sinister orb, unwinking and seeming full of wicked meaning. He wore no beard, and his wide mouth and square jaws had a singularly ugly expression. To complete his ill-appearance, his clothes were ill-fitting and worn to the last degree of shabbiness.

The hostler looked askance at this individual, who had arrived from Spalding in the carrier's cart not an hour before, and who had just partaken of dinner at the inn.

"Can you tell me, good fellow," said this hideously-scarred personage, "how far it is to Folliott Court, and in which direction it is?"

The hostler dropped his pump-handle.

"You must be a stranger here," he exclaimed, "not to know Folliott Court?"

"Yes, I am a stranger," replied the one-eyed man, impatiently. "I was never in Lincolnshire before. I arrived here only an hour ago, and landed in England only yesterday."

"Eh?" said the hostler, stupidly. "You speak English well, mister. And where may you be from?"

"I am English," was the irritated answer. "But I am just from India. Answer my question!"

He tossed the fellow a sixpence.

"Folliott Court is a mile west of the Fens. That's Folliott Park up yonder," said the hostler, more politely. "If you've come up for alms, as a many do, and meaning no offence to you, that is the Folliott Court carriage over the way, and my lady and my lady's niece are in the shop."

"I prefer to go to Folliott Court, my business is private," said the one-eyed man, with a dash of haughtiness hardly to be expected in a man of his appearance. "I would not speak to the ladies in the street."

Yet he sauntered across the street and halted on the sidewalk, seeming to admire the horses, which were champing their bits and pawing the earth.

While he stood there, idle yet observant, Lady Folliott, in her black carriage costume, came out and entered the carriage.

A moment later, the false Miss Bermyngham swept across the pavement with a sinuous grace and took her place opposite the baroness.

The one-eyed stranger started forward eagerly, his face glowing like fire.

The impostor had drawn down her short white veil to her red lips. As the footman climbed to his place, her gaze fell upon the hideous scarred face of the one-eyed man.

A strange gasping cry broke from her lips.

That cry was drowned in the noise of the wheels as the carriage started forward. The false Miss Bermyngham slowly averted her face, leaning over the side of the carriage. Her breath came in quick gasps. Her face was like the painted face of a corpse. Her eyes, wild and frenzied, had yet in them the stoniness of an awful terror.

"Alive! alive!" she cried out, in the depths of her own horrified and affrighted soul. "Alive! good God!

And I thought him dead. They said he was dead. Alive! And what a hideous wretch he looks! Is it he? Yes, by my own instincts, by this deadly, creeping horror I know him. It is he. He has traced me from India as Agatha Walden. Has he detected me under this disguise? Why is he here at Folliott Fens? Did he recognize me? Heaven! I stand upon the verge of an abyss—of ruin! I would give my soul to know if he recognized me!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. VOE.

The false Miss Bermyngham possessed a wonderful self-control, a marvelous power of self-repression. The sight of the hideous one-eyed stranger, standing idly upon the sidewalk of the high street of Folliott Fens, seemed temporarily to turn her to stone. She was stunned—paralyzed. That deadly stare of horror seemed frozen in her hard, black eyes. No pallor showed through the pink and white tinting of her face, and yet, as we have said, that face looked like the painted face of a corpse. A wave of awful faintness swept over her. All her faculties were engulfed in the great and dread horror that possessed her being.

But, gradually, the sound of the carriage-wheels obtruded itself upon her senses. An idle remark of Lady Folliott, who remained singularly pre-occupied and unobservant, startled her like a trumpet sound. And then her marvelous power of self-control stood her in good stead. She gathered up the reins of self-repres-

sion with a stern and powerful hand. Still dazed and bewildered, still terrified and affrighted, she yet gained a stony calmness and forced herself to reply, in a voice that was strained and hoarse, taking good care to keep her face averted.

Her changed voice aroused the baroness, who looked at her with suddenly awakened interest.

"Are you ill, my dear?" her ladyship inquired anxiously. "Your tones are so hoarse."

"I do not feel well, thank you, Aunt Folliott," said the impostor, languidly. "It is only a pain at my heart—a touch of the old disease which I fancied I was getting the better of—papa's old disease, you know."

Lady Folliott was all alarm upon the instant.

"My dear child—my dear Nerea!" she exclaimed. "What can I do for you? You do look ill, although you are not pale. Shall we go home?"

"Oh, no, no. I am quite well now," said the impostor. "Pray, don't trouble yourself about me, Aunt Folliott. I am quite recovered. The fresh air revives me."

But the baroness was troubled despite this assertion. She produced her jeweled vinaigrette and gently compelled the girl to inhale the pungent odors it contained. She overwhelmed her with attentions, and was at length rewarded by seeing the impostor resume her usual manner and appearance.

"I must really see a medical man about your heart-disease, Nerea," said Lady Folliott. "We will go up to London for the purpose. This is the first attack of it you have had since your return to England, is it not?"

The false Miss Bermyngham assented and became silent. The baroness watched her anxiously, and became also very quiet; but there was a deeper tenderness in her manner throughout the remainder of the drive, toward her supposed niece.

They performed the drive as originally planned, and returned home through Folliott Park. As they crossed the draw-bridge and rolled over the lawn, the impostor swept keen and furtive glances from her downcast eyes in every direction around her. But the one-eyed stranger, the sight of whom had so startled her at Folliott Fens, was not lurking about the grounds of Folliott Court as she half-expected and wholly feared. She drew a long sigh of relief that seemed to come from the very depth of her being.

They swept into the carriage-porch, and the girl was the first to alight. Lady Folliott descended more slowly, and the two entered the house together.

After a brief colloquy they separated, going to their separate apartments.

Safe in her own room, the false Miss Bermyngham double-locked her doors and stole to a recessed window, peeping cautiously out from between the folds of her lace and silken curtains upon the grounds spread out before her view, even scanning the highway beyond, a section of which was distinctly visible from her boudoir.

The disreputable-looking stranger of Folliott Fens was not anywhere to be seen.

She tore off her hat, as if its light pressure annoyed her, and sat down near the window.

"What does it all mean?" she asked herself. "How does it happen that he lives? Why is he here at Folliott Fens? Why did he leave India? Did he recognize me? If I knew—if I only knew!"

As abruptly as she had sat down she rose up, and with a swift, panther-like motion hurried to a long pier-glass that stretched from the floor nearly to the ceiling between the windows, and looked at her reflection with great black, wide-open eyes that were full of flaming fire.

"He knew me so thoroughly in the old days," she said to herself. "He knew me as well as I knew myself. He knew my tricks of make-up, my possibilities of disguise, my walk, my carriage, every feature of my face, every expression of my eyes. It is clear that he traced me to England under my disguise of Agatha Walden. He must have discovered that Agatha Walden is dead! Surely, he would not suspect the rich Miss Bermyngham, the great India heiress, of being one and the same with Agatha Walden, with *her*!"

She scanned her reflection eagerly and intently. The slight small figure in its Parisian dress of *écru* silk and Chantilly lace, the crepèd and fluffy mass of red-gold hair, falling upon the low forehead, the pink-and-white complexion, the red lips, all these made up a dazzling little blonde creature of remarkable prettiness.

"No, no," she muttered. "He could not have known me. He would not suspect—he could not! He would reject the suspicion, if it came to him, as utterly preposterous!"

The hard, tense expression in her eyes relaxed. She felt again a sense of security that was inexpressibly delightful.

"He did not know me," she said, with an air of decision, returning to her seat in the window. "And as for me, I should never have known him but for his eye. Or perhaps it was my instinct that told me. How changed he is! Why, one who had known him in India with his fair face, his handsome features, his gay, bright, reckless ways, would never recognize him now! They called him 'handsome Caspar,' I remember. He is hideous Caspar now," and she laughed unpleasantly. "I thought he was dead and buried. But he has lived and recovered to become a very monster for boys to mock in the streets and for dogs to bark at! And he

was so vain of his good-looks ! How he must hate me—that is *her* ! He was revengeful as Lucifer. If he had really recognized me, he would have sprung upon me like a tiger. He would have denounced me—made a scene—had me arrested !”

She shuddered and a desperate expression looked from her eyes for a single instant, but she had reassured herself, her courage was in the ascendant, and with every moment now she grew more and more at her ease.

Yet even as she continued to watch from her window, she beheld a man's figure upon the section of highway visible to her. Her gaze clung to it as if fascinated. The figure was presently hidden from her view by the intervening lodge, but a little later the small gate was flung open and the same figure appeared within the Folliott grounds. It crossed the marble arch spanning the moat and pursuing the wide pathway approached the mansion. The figure was that of the one-eyed stranger she had seen at Folliott Fens !

The impostor's heart seemed to stand still in her bosom.

“What does he want here ?” was the thought that formed itself in her mind.

Her heart resumed its beatings after a slow and muffled fashion.

The figure of the one-eyed stranger disappeared from her sight within the shadow of the porch.

Then the false Miss Bermyngham sprang from her seat, flew to her door, unlocked it, and darted into her dressing-room. She tore off her carriage costume with reckless hands, tossing it from her in a tattered heap. As quickly as possible, she enveloped herself in a dressing-gown of palest blue cashmere, and rang her bell sharply twice, her summons to her maid.

Her fingers yet clutched the embroidered bell-pull,

when a knock was heard upon the door of her boudoir, and Finette entered, bearing a small silver waiter, with a letter upon it. The Frenchwoman advanced to the dressing-room.

"A footman was bringing this letter to you, milady," said the maid, "but I took it from him, insisting on bringing it to you myself, as I was on my way to you."

"Well, what is it, Finette?" asked her young mistress, languidly, and with a well-feigned indifference. "A begging letter?"

"I think so, milady. The footman says that the man who brought it waits below in the great hall for an answer. And Jenkins says, milady, that the man is frightful looking, and has only one eye, and his face all scars."

"Give me the letter," said the false Miss Bermyngham, quietly. "And while I read it, Finette, you may get out my dinner-dress. I'll wear black and silver to-day."

She took up the letter, and passed into her boudoir. Sinking down into the nearest chair, she turned the missive over and over in her hands.

For a moment or more a blur covered her eyes, so that she could see nothing distinctly. Heaven knows what name she had feared to see upon that blue envelope, but when the blur cleared from her eyes she drew a long breath that was half a sob, as she read the address upon it—"Miss Bermyngham, Folliott Court."

"But what is in it?" she asked herself, with a sensation of sickness and cowardice. "What does he say to me? What a coward I am! Better brave the worst!" She tore open the envelope, extracting the letter it enclosed.

The letter written upon coarse blue paper, in a business-like hand, read as follows :

“IN THE STATIONER’S SHOP, FOLLIOTT FENS, }
June 21st, 1873. A }

“MISS BERMYNHAM—MADAM: Pardon a stranger for intruding upon your own private business affairs ; but the fact that those affairs are to me of the most vital importance must be my excuse. I have just seen you enter your carriage with your noble relative, Lady Folliott, and although by reason of your veil, and because also of my own impaired eyesight, I did not gain a perfect view of your features, yet I am persuaded that you will be gracious and kind even to one so far your social inferior as I.

“I desire to make some inquiries of you in regard to your maid, who is known to you under the name of Agatha Walden. I beg you not to allow her to know of this communication. If you will kindly grant me a few minutes’ interview, and pardon the awkwardness of my manner of addressing you in this letter and of making known my request, you will make me lastingly your debtor.

“Permit me to say, in conclusion, that for your own sake you should hear what I have to say concerning your maid. I am, madam, your obedient servant,

“CASPAR VOE.”

The false Miss Bermyngham’s eyes gleamed from beneath their half-shut lids as she read and re-read this letter.

“He does not suspect that I am not Miss Bermyngham,” she said to herself exultantly. “He does not suspect that I am the woman who called herself Agatha Walden. Blessings upon my veil, and upon his

impaired eyesight ! Losing one eye entirely has, I suppose, injured the sight of the other, thank my good genius ! And now, in regard to his communication. He has not heard that Agatha Walden is dead, it seems. He must be informed upon that point immediately."

After a moment's thought, the impostor called to her maid. The Frenchwoman came quickly from the inner room.

"Finette," said the young mistress, knitting her brows as in serious perplexity, "this letter you brought me is very singular—very singular indeed. The writer is evidently a friend of the maid who attended me during my voyage from India. He makes inquiries about her, and desires an interview with me. It is quite impossible that I should see him," and she glanced down at her dressing-gown. "You must go down to him, Finette, in my stead."

"Yes, mademoiselle," assented the Frenchwoman.

"And tell him," said the impostor, averting her face, and speaking in her usual soft and purring voice, "that I am dressing and unable to see him. And break the news to him gently, Finette, that the girl Agatha Walden is dead. She died very suddenly, as we entered the London station, you may tell him. She was buried at my expense, poor creature ! They will tell him all about it at the station. Tell him to apply to the station-master."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Tell him," continued the false Miss Bermyngham, "that the woman entered my service the week before I left Calcutta for England ; that she was very anxious to leave India, and that I liked her at sight and was filled with pity for her ; she seeming to have had some great trouble, and that she gave me unexceptionable references from former employers, which, however, I had no

time to verify. So I might almost be said to have taken her without references. I know nothing whatever of her history. She was very silent about herself. She seemed always frightened about something, and had a fear of being pursued. Tell the man all this, Finette, and let him go."

The impostor put up one jeweled hand as to conceal a yawn, and with the other made a gesture of dismissal to her attendant.

Finette departed upon her errand.

Making her way to the great lower hall, the French-woman discovered the visitor seated in a tall-backed, carved Elizabethan chair. The hall-porter was in his usual seat near the door, at some little distance from the stranger, of whose presence he had ceased to take cognizance.

Finette tripped up to the hideous, one-eyed stranger, who arose at her approach, bowing politely.

"I am milady's maid, monsieur," said the French-woman, it being her custom to bestow a title upon her young mistress at her own caprice. "I am come to you in her place. It is about milady's former maid, the poor Agatha, that you have come?"

The stranger, Casper Voe, as he had signed himself in his letter to the pretended India heiress, stared at the woman uncomprehendingly.

"I don't understand," he said, a blank expression overspreading his scarred and seamed visage. "Are you Miss Bermyngham's maid? Are you Agatha Walden?"

"Non, non," said Finette, shaking her head. "I am mademoiselle's maid, Finette Dubois. I am not Agathe Valden."

The blank expression upon Casper Voe's face deepened.

"Is not Miss Bermyngham newly arrived from India?" he asked.

"Certainment. She arrived three months since, monsieur."

"And you came with her from India?"

"I? But no, monsieur. She was attend by an English maid, the one you have named, Agathe Valden."

Casper Voe's face lit up with a sudden, lurid glow.

"We have been talking at cross-purposes, I think, mademoiselle," he said. "Is not this Agatha Valden now in the employ of Miss Bermyngham?"

The Frenchwoman replied in the negative.

"Where is Agatha Walden, then?"

Finette stole a furtive glance at the hideous, scarred face, all flushed with eagerness and glowing with a strange and indefinable expression that was both puzzling and disagreeable. The one eye of Caspar Voe stared at her with a bold and ravenous glance, as if he would tear her knowledge of Agatha Walden from her as a wild beast tears a coveted morsel from a weaker grasp.

The Frenchwoman shrank away from the visitor with a quick fear.

"Were you Agathe Valden's friend?" she asked. "Her lover?"

"No," he answered. "Neither her friend nor lover."

And by the lurid glow upon his visage, by the bold, bad light in his eye, and by the quick and terrible expression covering his features, the quick-witted Frenchwoman read that this man was indeed no friend to the woman who had called herself Agatha Walden but was instead her bitter, relentless and deadly enemy.

"Then," said Finette, shrinking away still further,

"I may as well tell you the truth. Agathe Valden is death!"

"Dead? Dead?"

"Yes, monsieur. She died at the very moment of her arrival into London—"

"I don't believe it! It's only one of her tricks. Oh, she was tricky as a devil! She feared I had survived—she knew the officers of the law would be on her track, and she meant to throw her pursuers off her scent! Dead! That story might go down with one who did not know her so well as I. She was a she-devil, all arts, all wiles! Dead! I would not believe it, if I saw her in her coffin. She was as tenacious of life as a cat. Dead! Impossible!"

"But, monsieur, she is dead of heart-disease—"

"Heart-disease? She had no heart," sneered Caspar Voe, his eye growing strangely brilliant, his face growing deathly white. "I don't believe it, mademoiselle. Who saw her die?"

"Milady, monsieur."

"Miss Bermyngham saw Agatha Walden die! Can I see Miss Bermyngham?"

"Impossible, monsieur. Mademoiselle must dress for dinner. She wish to be excuse. She told me what to say. Agathe Valden is surely dead and buried."

"Buried?" cried Voe, eagerly. "Did Miss Bermyngham see her buried?"

"No, monsieur—"

"I thought not. I knew she could not have seen her buried. There is some mistake about her death. Miss Bermyngham may have thought her dead when she was only in a swoon."

"You can learn all the story from the station-master at the London terminus," said the Frenchwoman,

briefly. "The girl is dead, and milady paid the expenses of her burial."

"If I could see Miss Bermyngham for only a few moments!" said Caspar Voe, in a low, quick voice. "You see, mademoiselle, I am not quite certain that this Agatha Walden is the woman of whom I am in search. It is true that I think they are one and the same, but the personal descriptions of the two differ. I may be mistaken. I am assailed with doubts and suspicions. Miss Bermyngham alone can satisfy these, and set my mind at rest forever. If she would only answer me a few questions concerning this maid of hers I should be satisfied. Do you not think you could induce her to give me a few minutes' private audience, mademoiselle?"

"Impossible, monsieur. Milady will not see you."

"Nothing is impossible to a clever Frenchwoman," said Caspar Voe insinuatingly. "I am persuaded, mademoiselle, that your young lady would see me if you were to urge her to do so. But if she should still refuse, why you are clever enough to obtain for me an interview, I am sure."

Finette was upon the point of uttering a vehement protest against this assertion, but the one-eyed stranger withdrew from his waistcoat-pocket two golden sovereigns, whose brightness dazzled her eyes, and she hastened to answer in a very different tone from that which had first suggested itself to her:

"I will see what I can do, monsieur. Milady will dress, will dine, and will sit with madam the baronne this evening. But to-morrow she will walk in the park. Sir Lionel is gone. She will be alone. Monsieur can then see her."

"Who is Sir Lionel?"

"Sir Lionel Charlton, the nephew of Lady Folliott,

very handsome, very noble. Mademoiselle will marry him."

"Ah! she will marry him!" said Mr. Voe, slowly. "Yes. I see! And you could not find an opportunity for me to see Miss Bermyngham until morning?"

"I think not. If Lady Folliott should retire early, as she does of late, you might then see Miss Bermyngham in the drawing-room. She sometimes remains there at the piano after madam retires."

Mr. Voe dropped the two sovereigns into the French-woman's hands.

"I won't trouble you further," he said. "I will act upon your hints for myself."

He bowed courteously and walked away. The hall-porter gave him egress.

As he went down the wide stone steps of the porch, Caspar Voe said to himself:

"It would seem my best course to go back to London and begin my search there at the station. But I will not go until I have seen this Miss Bermyngham. And I shall see her this very night. I swear it!"

And with a grim, hard smile he strode down the avenue, crossed the draw-bridge, and vanished in the road beyond.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FAMILIAR VOICE.

The long gray English twilight had given place to the soft warm shadows of the evening. The ladies of Folliott Court had dined, and were now in the drawing-room. Lady Folliott, in a high black-silk gown, with a stately Elizabethan ruff of point lace encircling her neck

and setting off her high-coiffed, noble head as an appropriate frame sets off to advantage a handsome picture, half-reclined in a great Voltaire chair, a bit of wool embroidery in her hands.

The false Miss Bermyngham sat at the piano, her fingers straying idly over the keys, producing a dreamy melody as soft and sweet as the music of distant evening bells.

The impostor, despite her newly-awakened terrors and anxieties, was dressed with great care and taste. If her guilty, shallow soul held one passion greater than another, that passion was love of luxury and indolence. To wear silken robes, and misty lace, and gleaming jewels, to loll on satin couches, to be waited upon, these were for her the great goods of life. And thus, even upon this evening, she was handsomely attired, and after a manner to enhance the charms of her pink-and-white complexion, and the red-gold dishevelment of her hair.

Her dress was of thin, black silken tissue, the flounces embroidered with silver. Her belt was of flexible silver, with a jeweled clasp. Her ornaments were all of filigree silver, of oriental design and manufacture; but jewels were held here and there among the slender wires, like fireflies caught in a gleaming net.

Lady Folliott's gaze dwelt upon the small, childish figure, in its night-like draperies of cloud and starlight, with an expression of the deepest tenderness and affection. This girl, with her caressing, purring ways, with her kitten-like softness and pretty childishness, was growing dearer to her with every hour. She realized that fact now with startling force. The incident of the afternoon—the girl's pretended illness—had aroused her affection for her supposed niece to quicker force and keener action.

“It's the tie of blood, I suppose, that attracts me to

her so strongly," the baroness thought, as she continued to regard the girl. "And yet I think I should love her if she were not akin to me, she is so guileless, so innocent, so sweet! How can Lion resist her artless sweetness, her winning prettiness? And yet Beatrix, with her beauty, her noble character, her steadfast resoluteness, her grandeur of soul, her scorn of little arts and trickeries, perhaps far better deserves his love. She is more nearly his equal. It is all a puzzle to me," and Lady Folliott sighed. "Yet I am convinced that Nerea will make him happy, and every interest will be served by their union. As for Beatrix, with her fortune and her beauty, she will make a grand alliance a year or two hence. If it were not for my niece, I should be well pleased to have Lion marry Beatrix. But that is now impossible. Nerea loves Lion, and he will—he must—marry her."

She continued to meditate upon this subject, planning how to carry out her cherished schemes for the union of Sir Lionel Charlton and her supposed niece. The music, soft and dreamy, rippled slowly from beneath the jeweled fingers of the pretended Nerea.

The windows were open to admit the evening breeze. The lace curtains fell to the floor and their misty folds were stirred with the soft summer wind. The grates were filled with rare and beautiful ferns. The vases on the mantelpieces were crowded with odorous flowers. The fragrance of the garden blossoms crept in on the light breeze. The dozen wax-lights burned mellowly in their silver sconces. The great drawing-room, with its frescoed ceiling, its hundred articles of luxury and ease, its rare pictures, its gleaming statuary, its great chandeliers, with their forests of unlighted candles, its stately furniture, its two occupants, presented a charming picture of elegance and luxury.

This picture was not to be without an observer.

The night without was bright and pleasant, with starlight, with the softness and sweetness of a balmy June evening. Through the park came the figure of the hideous one-eyed stranger from India—Mr. Caspar Voe. He pursued an avenue shaded by trees which led to the mansion. He crossed the marble arch spanning the moat, and with fleet and silent steps crossed the lawn with its shade-trees, its fountains, and statuary, and drew near to the great-house.

The lights from the drawing-room caught his eye. The rippling music reached his ears.

“Miss Bermyngham is playing to her aunt,” he said to himself, halting involuntarily in the shadow of a marble faun, mounted upon a pedestal. “Or, possibly, she is alone? I must see.”

He moved onward, creeping close to the walls of the house. A flowering shrub in a great tub before one of the drawing-room windows afforded him concealment. He crept between the shrub and the window, and peeped cautiously into the room.

At first the long and splendid vista dazzled him, but presently he made out the figure of Lady Folliott in her chair. But the player at the piano was out of the range of his vision. He ventured to put forth his hand and push back the folds of the curtains, and to peer in with an eye all ablaze with eagerness, but he could not see the false Miss Bermyngham.

His gaze settled upon the handsome face of Lady Folliott. He noted how strong was that face, how thoughtful, how resolute. Its calm, high-bred air of repose did not escape him. Nor did the tender, affectionate regard she sent in the direction of the girl at the piano escape his observation.

“How she loves her niece!” he said to himself. “I

wish I could see Miss Bermyngham. What's to prevent my going again to yonder door and asking to see her? The footman could not say that she is now engaged. Why shouldn't I boldly demand to see her?" He drew back a little and looked down at his garments.

They were thoroughly shabby.

"I see now why I was not admitted before," he thought. "The footman took me for a beggar. Well, I look like one. And my hideous face, my single eye, my scars, and my general repulsiveness of visage, doubtless frightened the worthy fellow. He may have taken me for a thief. No, he will send me away as before if I apply to him. It is not for such as I to approach the great heiress, the dainty silk-robed Miss Bermyngham! I shall be able to see her only by the use of strategy. But I will see her! I will not go back to London to trace out the fate of Agatha Walden until I shall have seen Miss Bermyngham and heard from her own lips all she knew about the girl who attended her on the voyage from India! If I go back to London, I shall learn only the dry and barren facts of the woman's death and burial. But Miss Bermyngham can describe her maid to me; she can tell me the color of her eyes and complexion; the tones of her voice; her ways. A few words from Miss Bermyngham will set at rest forever my doubts and suspicions in regard to Agatha Walden. A few words from her will convince me whether I have come from India on a wild goose chase, leaving the woman of whom I am in search in hiding there, or whether under the light-colored hair and light skin of Agatha Walden were hidden the black hair and swarthy complexion of Liliias Voe, the fugitive from justice; Liliias Voe, my wife, the murderer of our child, the almost murderer of myself!"

He gritted his teeth savagely, and his one eye burned like a coal of fire.

Lilias Voe, the escaped murderess—his wife, the destroyer of her child and his—his attempted destroyer ! This was the woman of whom he was in search, his very soul thirsting for revenge upon her, this the woman whom he suspected of having effected her escape from India under the assumed name of Agatha Walden, and under the disguise of Miss Bermyngham's maid !

“Only let me find out the truth !” he muttered, under his breath. “But I hope that she is not dead ! If ever I prayed, I'd pray that she might not be dead ! Dead ! I'll never believe it ! It is only a trick she played. She knew that the officers of justice would pursue her—that the bloodhounds of the law would be on her track. She has feigned death to throw them off the scent. Oh, she was cunning—a very devil ! I'll scour all England but that I find her. And when I find her I'll torture her cowardly soul even unto death. And when I shall have tortured her to my fill I will give her over into the hangman's hands.”

He set his teeth together hard and his face looked as might have looked the face of a demon.

Meanwhile, all unconscious of the lurking avenger without, unconscious of the gleaming eye at the window, the false Miss Bermyngham played on.

But presently the music stopped abruptly, and she arose and crossed the floor with studied grace and sank down into a chair at a little distance from Lady Folliott, and within range of the eye at the window.

Caspar Voe started and surveyed her eagerly.

As he had said in his note to the false Miss Bermyngham, the sight of his remaining eye had been greatly impaired since the loss of its mate. Yet he

could make out the outlines of the slight and child-like figure, the flowing folds of her black dress, the gleam of her rich jewels. More than this, he could distinguish the features of her face.

He saw that her face was softly tinted, pink and white, that her lips were like reddest coral, that her hair was of a red-gold shade, and heaped high in fluffy puffs and crimps, after a fashion new to his colonial eye. She seemed to him rarely lovely, a delicate piece of prettiness, a high-bred, dainty creature, worthy her great fortune.

"She's not haughty, nor overbearing," he said, to himself, eyeing her critically. "She is like a French ingénue. I've seen dozens of them on the stage. Lilius, with her own black hair and black eyes, made up well in the part. No crack actress at one of the swell theatres could have excelled her in that one part. If she was a second-rate, music-hall actress she had real talent in her. What a swell this Miss Bermyngham is! One could tell that she had been born to a high station!"

The false Miss Bermyngham took up a piece of embroidery and lazily pushed the needle in and out of the meshes. She was not accomplished, as Lady Folliott had long since discovered. She could not draw, or paint pictures, even in water colors. She understood no language save her own. She could dance like a sylph, but she declared that she could not sing. She could play the piano, rendering certain pieces, mostly operatic, with perfect accuracy, but the soul was generally lacking from these performances. She gave the letter of the music; the subtle spirit she failed to catch. She had no liking for charity-work. She did not like to read. And so she fell back, for amusement and employment, at those rare times when she desired

employment, upon the great resource of the vapid-minded, indolent young women of the present day, fancy-work.

But even this she did not do heartily, as if it were a pleasure to her. After a few stitches, she dropped her canvas and leaned back in her chair, half hiding a yawn with one jewelled hand.

"Are you tired, Nerea, darling?" asked Lady Folliott, in a tone of solicitude. "Would you like to retire?"

The impostor's reply was inaudible to the listener, the girl sitting too far from the window to permit even the prowler's ears to catch her tones.

"Very well, dear," responded the baroness, who sat much nearer the window than her young companion and whose voice was plainly audible to Caspar Voe. "But I am seriously troubled about you. This pain at your heart alarms me. I think you are not quite fit to travel up to London. I shall telegraph to Sir Henry Graham to come down to us."

Again the impostor's reply was inaudible to Caspar Voe, but he could see that she was uttering a vigorous protest.

As the false Miss Bermyngham was feigning a malady, it would not answer her purpose to have a great London physician summoned to attend her. She did not care to risk the exposure of the cheat she was practising.

"I am sorry, Nerea, that you have so great aversion to medical men," said Lady Folliott, gravely. "But, if you are quite positive that you are steadily growing better, and that medicine will not benefit you so much as fresh air and sunshine, I am willing to wait until we go up to town before we consult Sir Henry. I hope I am doing right in thus yielding to you. But we must go up to London soon."

The false Miss Bermyngham shrugged her shoulders. Then, with downcast eyes—the watcher had already noticed that she kept her heavy eyelids well down over her eyes—she drew nearer to the baroness, sitting down upon a hassock at her ladyship's feet. Her next words, like those she had hitherto uttered, were, inaudible to the watcher, but they were in truth a shy confession, given as it had been forced from her, of her love for Sir Lionel Charlton.

"Oh, Aunt Folliott," said this astute little actress, playing upon the generous soul of the baroness with ruthless hands, "no medical man can help me. I thought I was quite recovered from my illness. All I wanted was your care and love. But now—the reason I am not so well—you know what it is, dear Aunt Folliott. You surely know what it is!"

She buried her face in Lady Folliott's dress.

"My dear child," said the baroness, agitated and perplexed, "what do you mean? Is it—is it anxiety about Lionel?"

The girl nodded her head.

"Yes, yes," she said, and her voice was broken with sobs. "You wanted me to love him. You told me that I was to marry him. And so—and so—I love him. And I fear he doesn't love me. If he does not, I shall die. Aunt Folliott pity me. It is love for Lionel that is bringing back my old heart-disease."

The effect of this skillful lie was to agonize Lady Folliott to the very depths of her being.

It was she then who had wrought this great trouble. Her supposed niece would die of unrequited love for Sir Lionel Charlton, all through her—Lady Folliott's—own fault. She grew deathly white, and her eyes expressed her anguish and remorse for her own thoughtlessness.

Leaning forward, she took the girl in her arms and kissed her passionately, and shed tears over her.

"My darling! My poor darling!" she exclaimed. "Do not cry so! All will be well. Lionel admires you—loves you. You are to be his wife, Nerea, his loved and worshipped wife. Nerea, every sob of yours goes to my heart. What have I done, my poor innocent lamb? Cheer up, darling, I will recall Lionel to-morrow. Believe in me. I repeat it: all will be well."

The impostor conquered her excessive grief, and permitted Lady Folliott to embrace and caress her in remorseful tenderness, and then with the sigh of a martyr, she extricated herself from the arms of the baroness, and said softly:

"Do not blame yourself, dear Aunt Folliott. I would not have told you, only to let you know that physicians can do me no good. Forget what I have said. Lionel must choose for himself. If he prefer Beatrix, I—I am not afraid to die!"

Her mournful air and the two tears she managed to drop from beneath her eyelids wrought Lady Folliott's distress to a climax. Her ladyship arose hurriedly, took a hurried walk about the room, and then approaching the girl said tremulously:

"May God forgive me if I have done wrong, Nerea. I meant to bring about this marriage to make both you and Lionel happy. He cannot care for Beatrix. He must love you. I will go to my room and write to him to return immediately."

And the baroness hurried away to her own room to give expression to her grief and remorse in solitude, and to write a letter to Sir Lionel Charlton, informing him in as delicate terms as possible of the fact that he had won the false Nerea's heart, and that the girl's life depended upon him,

"Heaven knows," thought the poor lady, in her distraction, "that I would screen my child's secret with my life, were it not that her life is involved. Lionel is generous as the sun. If he has a preference for Beatrix, he will conquer it when he knows this truth. He will save Nerea. I know his grand, chivalrous nature. And I know too that Nerea will make him happy."

While Lady Folliott was thus employed, the false Miss Bermyngham, laughing in her sleeve at the clever manner in which she had warded off the visit of a doctor, and had, at the same time, furthered her schemes in regard to the young baronet, sauntered towards the window, outside of which the watcher lurked.

He shrank back amid the branches of the shrub which screened him.

"Shall I speak to her now?" he asked himself. "I could enter the window. I must ask her about that maid—"

The girl diverted her course to a bell-pull, which she rang violently.

The watcher held his breath. Had she discovered his presence? A servant appeared.

"Bring me some iced sherbet," said the false Miss Bermyngham, in the loud, imperious tone she usually employed in speaking to servants. "And be quick about it!"

As the servant retired, Caspar Voe fell back into the shrubbery, startled, bewildered, aghast!

"What does this mean?" he whispered. "That was Miss Bermyngham? That? Why, that was the voice of Lilius Voe, my fugitive wife, the escaped murderess! What does it mean?"



CHAPTER XXXI.

COMING TO TERMS.

Caspar Voe, in his concealment outside the drawing-room window, remained motionless and stupefied, like a man suddenly stricken with paralysis, continuing to watch the false Miss Bermyngham with a strange and bewildered stare.

"It was the voice of that escaped murderess—my fugitive wife," was the thought that shaped itself in his confused mind. "But that is not the face of Liliias Voe. Yet I could swear to the voice."

Unconscious of the baleful scrutiny of the sinister watcher, the pretended India heiress took a turn or two across the floor, yawned once or twice, and then approached a full-length mirror, and pausing before it, surveyed the reflection of her pretty face and figure with clearly evident self-admiration.

She gave a touch with her jeweled fingers to the fluffy mass of red-gold hair that fell upon her forehead; she toyed with the long curl that fell over her shoulder; she arranged her black and silver draperies with increased effect; and finally scrutinized her face with keen and critical glances.

"That is like Liliias, all over!" thought the one-eyed watcher. "She was vain as a peacock. She had that

very trick of admiring herself before a mirror. I could think this Miss Bermyngham Lilius herself, but for the impossibility of the thing ! The voice, the walk, the actions, all belong to Lilius Voe ! As to the hair and complexion, Lilius was an actress and a rare hand at making herself up as a blonde. But the costly dress—her position here—the fact that the old lady called her Nerea—these things go to prove that she is Miss Bermyngham ! My mind is all confused. One thing only I am sure of, and that is I shall see Miss Bermyngham face to face and shall ask her about her maid—”

At this moment the false Miss Bermyngham started abruptly away from the mirror, and approached the window. The next instant the servant re-entered the drawing-room, bearing upon a small salver a goblet and a small engraved glass jug filled with sherbet. He deposited these upon a table and withdrew.

The girl turned to the table and proceeded to fill the goblet with the beverage. Her back was to the window. Caspar Voe, by this time master of himself, calm and cool as a Bow Street officer, crept nearer to the open window, watching her with gleaming eyes.

“I must see her !” he said to himself. “They will refuse to admit me at the door. I am filled with strange suspicions. Even if the so-called Agatha Walden be dead, I must hear what Miss Bermyngham can tell me about her. And, by Heaven ! I must know who Miss Bermyngham is ! Whatever the risk to myself, I must hear her speak again !”

With the quickness and springiness of a cat, he crept in at the window. For an instant he lingered in the protection of the lace drapery, and then he stole forward silently over the thick velvet carpet, approaching within a few feet of the unconscious heiress.

She had raised the delicate goblet to her lips and was

slowly sipping its contents with apparent pleasure. Some rustling sound, some subtle instinct, or it might have been the deep yet half-suppressed breathing of the intruder, caused her suddenly to turn her head, and she beheld Caspar Voe!

He stood grim and strange and terrible, his one eye savage, lurid, and with a mocking glare in it; his seamed and scarred visage glowing with suspicion, eagerness and doubt; his ugly mouth wearing an odd smile half of wicked delight, half of incredulousness.

The goblet fell from the hand of the pretended heir-ess and was shattered upon the marble-topped table.

The girl herself, her painted visage showing no change, but her black eyes dilating in horror, sprang backwards with an inarticulate cry, upraising her hands as if to ward off an attack!

Caspar Voe looked full into her black eyes, so strikingly in contrast to her blonde hair and complexion, and his face glowed with savage jubilation.

He took a step nearer to her. She recoiled, her hands still upraised, her eyes expressing her cowardly terror.

Caspar Voe smiled an odd, baleful smile.

"Have I the honor of addressing Miss Bermyngham?" he asked, in a sibilant voice.

The girl breathed hard. She did not answer, but nodded her head and took another backward step.

"You will pardon my intrusion I trust, Miss Bermyngham," said Caspar Voe, with horrible politeness, his glaring eye seeming to devour her face feature by feature. "I am sorry to enter unannounced, but you declined to see me, you know, and the hall-porter would not be apt to admit a man of my appearance a second time, so I came in at the window."

The girl gave a sudden spring backward to the wall

and clutched at the bell-rope. With her disengaged hand she pointed to the window.

"You offer me a chance of escape," said Voe, coolly, "and if I don't accept it you'll ring and have me thrust forth by the servants. You are good at dumb show. One would almost think you had played in the pantomime. But I shall not go, my lady, until I have had speech with you. If you ring and have me thrust forth, I shall demand to see Lady Folliott. They say that she sees every one who comes to her."

His tone was full of deadly menace. The girl's hand still grasped the bell-rope, but she did not dare to pull it.

In truth, her soul was the battle-ground of furious emotions in that moment. Sick with terror, affrighted to the depths of her cowardly nature, she yet felt the impulse to act with a semblance of bravery, to do as she would have done were she really and truly Miss Bermyngham—to call for help, to have this intruder cast out as a burglar and thief, to carry her part with a high hand, to brave out the affair, in short.

But while capable of treacheries and crimes, while secret and false and wicked, she was not capable of acting upon this impulse and braving out the affair. She knew herself guilty, and, actress as she was, she had not courage to arouse the household, and conduct herself as an innocent woman would have done. She knew Caspar Voe, and knew him for a relentless enemy—vindictive, terrible, and not to be thwarted. He might have fathomed her identity. He might have officers of the law outside waiting his summons. She knew that her disguise would have effectually hidden her identity from the eyes of Love. Even the most devoted lover who had known her in her original estate, would never suspect her under her character of the rich Miss

Bermyngham. But the eyes of Love are less keen than the eyes of Hate ! Did Caspar Voe know her under all this paint and yellow hair-dye, and silken robes and glittering jewels ?

Her glance involuntarily sought a convenient mirror. And at the sight of the pretty blonde picture she beheld, her courage revived a little. Looking at her enemy through the thick fringes of her eyelids, she said, in a hoarse whisper, utterly unlike her usual tones :

“Who are you ? What do you want ? How dare you enter this house in this manner ? Are you a burglar ?”

Caspar Voe smiled again, and at that smile the girl shuddered.

“Who am I ?” he repeated. “My name is Caspar Voe. What do I want ? I have certain questions to ask you which you must answer. How dare I enter this house in this manner ? Why, I have explained that I could not otherwise have seen you. I heard your voice through the open window, and it reminded me of a certain voice I once knew—a voice that once seemed to me, despite its shrillness, very sweet and pleasant.”

The girl trembled visibly. She sat down unconsciously in a chair, still clinging to the bell-rope, which yet she dared not pull.

“I will tell you my story,” said Caspar Voe, standing up before her, grim, mocking, and awful in his sinister triumph. “I have said that my name is Caspar Voe. I am just arrived from India. I am in pursuit of a fugitive murderess—a young woman, with your eyes and voice, my lady, but with dark complexion and black hair. Her real name is Liliias Voe. I have reason to think that she made her escape from India under the assumed name of Agatha Walden, and in the character of a lady’s maid to an orphaned heiress, Miss Bermynham. I traced the two, mistress and maid, to

England. Having ascertained of Miss Bermyngham's former waiting-woman in Calcutta the destination of her young mistress in England, I came on directly to Folliott Court without pausing in London. It so happened that I heard nothing therefore in London of Agatha Walden's death. Is the girl who came to England under the name of Agatha Walden dead?"

"Yes," said the false Miss Bermyngham, still in a whisper. "She is dead and buried."

"Are you Miss Bermyngham?"

The girl nodded. She tried to bow haughtily, but the motion of her head was feeble and dejected.

"Did you know the history of this self-styled Agatha Walden?" asked Voe, continuing to watch his prey with a glittering, evil eye.

"No—no! How should I know? She brought good references, which I had not time to verify," said the pretended heiress, still in that hoarse whisper, wondering how much her visitor suspected concerning her identity, and so wrought up with excitement that she longed to give utterance to a wild shriek, or take refuge in a fit of hysterics.

"Shall I tell you her history?" asked Voe. "She is no taller than you, my lady, a mere girl still in years, but old in wickedness. She is English-born. She is my wife. When I first saw her she was a girl of twenty, a variety actress in Calcutta, a pretty brunette, rather a favorite with a certain coarse crowd, and the recipient of many gifts from her admirers. It was a feverish, bad life for a girl of her temperament. I fell in love with her, and after three months' acquaintance we were married. I earned a precarious living, and she continued on the boards. We were poor, of course, but for a year we were happy. I adored my wife; I believe that she loved me. But a change came over

the spirit of our dream. She grew tired of me. She was of a fickle nature. She missed the admirers who fell away after the fact of her marriage became known. She became fretful, cross, and ugly in her temper. She reviled me for my poverty and idleness. And hell succeeded to heaven in our domestic life !”

“What is all this to me ?” said the false Miss Bermyngham, hoarsely, plucking up courage. “My maid is dead. Whatever her faults, they died with her !”

The thick, ugly lips of Caspar Voe again wore that smile that made the pretended heiress tremble.

“Let me tell you the rest,” he said. “I was not a good man, but she, my wife, was a demon ! she might have made me better, but her bitter words stung me to badness. I became utterly idle and took to drink. We were supported by her earnings. At last our child was born, but the little one only made matters worse. It was neglected by us both, and became cross and sickly. Liliias seemed to hate it. She was very fond of dress and spent the greater portion of her salary upon her wardrobe. She was very vain, vain as she was fickle. Matters grew worse with us. Liliias became a singer and actress in a music hall. I got work now and then, but continued to drink heavily. As God is my judge, if my wife had treated me decently and made a home for me, I would have been a good husband to her, an industrious, sober man. But other men’s flatteries were sweeter to her than her husband’s commendations !”

The false Miss Bermyngham’s lips curled in a sneer. Seeming not to notice the expression of her face, Voe continued :

“Our child was two years old when the end came. Poor little fellow ! I grew to love him dearly during the last year of his little life. One night I went home

early. I had been drinking a little, but I was not drunk. I took my child in my arms and cried over him. Liliás had not returned from the music-hall. She never suffered me to go for her in these days. I waited for her return, but she did not come. Midnight passed. I was nearly wild with anxiety. I resolved to go for her. I said to myself that I would be a better husband to her in the future. I would throw myself at her feet and implore her pardon. We would begin anew. God knows that I was full of anguish and repentance that night. It might have been a turning point in our lives. I waited, expecting her every moment. I knew that the music-hall must long since have been closed. Where could she be? Where could I go to look for her? I put up my window, and watched the street. At last I saw her coming. She was attended by a man whom I hated—a gambler, a roué, a thoroughly bad character. They paused under the lamp in front of our door. I saw them part with kisses. When Liliás came up, I was mad with jealousy. A frightful scene followed. She was beside herself with fury. A couple of hours later, I crept into bed, and toward morning I fell into a troubled sleep.”

“Well?” said the false Miss Bermyngham, but her voice was tremulous and her eyes downcast.

“The end came that night. While I was sleeping, all the wickedness of that woman’s nature burst its bonds and overflowed in one great awful crime! She had been wrought up to an insane fury. And when we were sleeping, the child and I, she bound my arms to my side with cords and caught up a carving-knife and crept towards me and attacked me with frenzy. She stabbed my face and breast a score of times. I was bound and helpless, and soon became unconscious under her attack. She left me for dead. Then she

stabbed the little helpless, sleeping child and killed him. And then she fled the house."

The false Miss Bermyngham shaded her face with her hand.

"I was found by a fellow-lodger who chanced to call early in the morning. They thought me dead. Indeed, my death was announced in the newspapers. I was weeks in regaining sufficient strength to leave the house. The newspapers had printed great headlines, such as, 'Awful crime! Murder of a husband and child by an actress!' and my wife must have believed me dead. The poor little child was buried in a pauper's grave. The police searched for Liliias everywhere. When I got well, I set myself to examining the lists of departures by steamers. I knew that she was a coward and would flee the country. I examined into the history of every passenger of whatever rank or position. Every person, however humble, seemed to have been known; every person excepting Miss Bermyngham's maid, Agatha Walden. I went to Miss Bermyngham's former nurse and waiting-woman and made inquiries. She described Agatha Walden, and informed me that she had given good references, which Miss Bermyngham had, through haste or carelessness, not verified. The woman remembered the names given as references. They were names of veritable people. I called upon them. They had never even heard of Agatha Walden. There was deceit and trickery to begin with. Agatha Walden was not what she had pretended to be. The conviction came upon me that she was Liliias Voe and none other. I determined to follow her to England and worked my passage here. I had sworn an awful oath to be revenged upon her. I had sworn to see her die upon the scaffold. I had sworn to find her if she was above ground. Murderess! She shall suffer for her

crimes ! Unnatural mother ! false, bad wife, your judgment hour approaches ! I am come !”

He folded his arms and stood before the cowering woman, an incarnate Hatred and Revenge.

“Do you see this hideous face of mine ?” he said, with a bitter laugh. “I owe it to her. The very dogs bark at me in the streets. I am an outcast, living only for vengeance. Yet I was a gentleman’s son ; I had a kindly nature once ; I might have been a gentleman to-day in position but for her. These scars on my face, my lost eye—she gouged it from its socket in her mad rage—my murdered boy—all—all cry for vengeance ! I am come to take it !”

“You are mad !” cried the false Miss Bermyngham, in terror. “Stand back ! I will ring for help—”

“Stop !” demanded Caspar Voe. “Woman, do you think your shallow pretences, your hair-dye, your paint, and your assumed character, have deceived me ? I have been playing with you, as a cat plays with a mouse. *I know you !*”

The pretended India heiress gave a quick, wild gasp for breath.

“*I know you !*” repeated her enemy, with evil jubilation. “I have seen you made up as a blonde many a time, you know, for pieces on the stage ! What have you done with Miss Bermyngham ? Did you kill her, too ?”

The girl cast a desperate look around her, and at the pitiless face and glaring eyes of her enemy. There was no escape for her. She was discovered. Despite her disguise, she stood revealed as Lilius Voe, the murderess, the fugitive from justice, the base adventuress, the wicked and treacherous woman !

She yielded to fate. She resolved to temporize with this man. It would be useless to deny her identity. And so, while her busy brain plotted some way of evad-

ing public exposure and a shameful death, she said sullenly :

“No, I did not kill her. She died of heart disease.”

“And you passed her off as Agatha Walden? You changed identities with her?”

The girl bowed assent.

The man reflected.

“You succeeded to Miss Bermyngham’s possessions?” he said presently, in a low voice. “You have full control of all her vast wealth !”

“Full control.”

The pair watched each other for a full minute in a dead silence.

The man was desperately poor. He hated work. He had but a few shillings in his pocket. He knew no trade or profession. He had a love of idleness and luxury, even as his wife had. She had money at her command in almost unlimited amount. He thirsted for her blood. Not all the money in the world could have induced him to forego his revenge upon her. But he was wily also. He asked himself why he should not secure some of the wealth under her control before betraying her? Why not compel her to make over to him a pecuniary independence before delivering her up to the officers of the law?

The woman read his thoughts as readily as if they had been printed on paper. She comprehended his meditated treachery, but she was also treacherous.

“I would pay any price for safety,” she said, in a whisper. “The Bermyngham property is carefully invested in consols and securities completely under my control. Suppose you give me up to the hangman? You will have your revenge, it is true, but you will be poor, you will have to earn every crust you eat. But if you agree never to molest or betray me, I will bind

myself to pay you ten thousand pounds a year so long as I am unmolested."

"Ten thousand pounds!" The man's features worked.

"I will give you a cheque for ten thousand pounds this very hour," said the woman.

"I want no cheques. Would the bankers pass any such sum to me, do you think, with this face, this dress?" said the man, curtly. "You must give me money."

"I will telegraph to London to have ten thousand pounds in notes and gold sent up to me by special messenger," said the false Miss Bermyngham, after a moment's thought. "Upon the evening of the day after to-morrow I will engage to pay the amount I have named into your hands."

Voe deliberated.

"I must have more than that," he said, greedily. "You must bring me some of your—her—jewels, too. Bring all you have, or it will be the worse for you!"

"You agree then to leave me alone? You will not betray me?"

"I agree! Bring me ten thousand pounds in notes and gold and all your jewels, and you shall go unharmed. I will leave you rope enough to hang yourself. But don't attempt any tricks on me. The money and jewels—or a disgraceful death! These are your alternatives!"

"Where am I to find you at the time appointed? We must not be seen. We will meet in Folliott Park—in the great open space by the fountain. You can find out the place for yourself between now and then. And now go. Some one may enter. If you are found here, all is lost."

Caspar Voe turned and withdrew as he had entered

the room, without another word. Outside he paused in the shrubbery, and looking back, muttered :

“ I'll take her money and jewels and secrete them in some safe place. They will provide handsomely for me in some other land where I can live as pleases me. And, having secreted the plunder so that it cannot be taken from me, I will betray her remorselessly, and watch her to the very scaffold ! Within a week she shall be in jail on the charge of murder ! ”

He strode away into the darkness, all aglow with sinister delight.

Meanwhile, the girl crept to the doors and to the conservatory, and made sure that no listener had been near during her conversation with Caspar Voe. Then she sat down utterly strengthless, yet with her mind full of bold schemes.

“ He means to take my money and jewels, and betray me,” she thought. “ He will leave me in safety a day or two, and then have me arrested. Flight is impossible. He or I must die ! I will meet him in the park—oh, I'll be there. But he will not leave the park alive. But how is his death to be accomplished ? How am I to remove him from my path ? ”

CHAPTER XXXII.

BETROTHED.

We will now resume our narration of the experiences of Beatrix, whom we left comfortably established in the cottage of Miss McTavish, near the city of Durham.

The fugitive heiress found in the Scottish spinster a

hospitable hostess and sympathizing friend. Life at Bruce Cottage was dull and monotonous, but there was a flower-garden and lawn, pleasant walks, rows on the river, drives in a pony-phaeton, books to read, and a piano; and Beatrix was more than content. She was like sunshine in the house, her hostess frequently assured her.

In the course of a week her boxes arrived from London, whither Lady Folliott had sent them, and Beatrix began to feel settled in her new home.

The days glided by without event. Letters came often from Lady Folliott, who, despite her opposition to a marriage between Beatrix and Sir Lionel Charlton, was yet tenderly attached to the young heiress. No letters came from the baronet, but Beatrix did not expect any. She believed that Sir Lionel was to marry the false Miss Bermyngham, and endeavored to avoid even thinking of him.

While her days were spent thus tranquilly, Colonel Brand was leaving no stone unturned to discover her.

His wife and son seconded his efforts, assisting him ably. They searched London for her in vain. They advertised for her, offering a reward for information leading to her discovery. They employed assistants in their search, but they only knew that Beatrix had set out, after her departure from Folliott Court, with an attendant, with tickets for London, and that she had disappeared somewhere upon the route, but at what point she had disappeared remained a mystery.

Colonel Brand grew furious. It would have fared hard with Beatrix if he could have found her after his long and vain search for her.

When his patience, however, had become quite exhausted, and his naturally irritable temper absolutely savage, there arrived one day addressed to him a letter,

the handwriting of which he recognized as that of "Ann Jones."

Tearing it open, he read these words :

"Miss Beatrix Rohan, care of Miss Marcell, 44 Cravenhill Street, Notting Hill, London, W."

Besides this address, there was not a word.

"It seems to have been transcribed from some letter !" the colonel said to his fellow-conspirators. "Come, Selina. We will go to Miss Marcell's at once. You must do the maternal and afflicted. The girl is probably there. We shall bring her away with us."

They hastened to Cravenhill Street, Notting Hill, in a cab, and found Miss Marcell at home.

She was an elderly lady, a gentlewoman, one of Lady Folliott's numerous pensioners. To all their inquiries, she remained absolutely dumb. She was icily polite, but it was quite evident that she had been warned against them and put upon her guard, and all Mrs. Brand's pretended grief and prayerful entreaties were wasted upon her. Colonel Brand essayed different tactics. He became warlike, blustered and threatened, and spoke of the majesty of the law, but Miss Marcell only smiled, and finally said :

"Miss Rohan is not in my house, sir. She has never been here. As to her whereabouts, I decline to inform you. You will oblige me by taking your instant departure."

As it was evident that Miss Marcell told the truth—that Beatrix was not an inmate of the house—and as nothing was to be gained by remaining, Colonel and Mrs. Brand took their departure, Miss Marcell seeing them to the door herself.

As they returned to their lodgings in their cab, Mrs. Brand remarked :

"Did you notice, Colonel, that Miss Marcell did not summon her servant to see us out? Depend upon it, the maid who admitted us knows where Beatrice is. We must communicate with the maid, bribe her, and pump out of her what information she possesses."

"Very good, although it seems easier said than done. I'll try it however."

He did try it. He returned to Notting Hill at a later hour that same day, and lounged about Cravenhill Street. He saw the housemaid at number forty-four at the gate once or twice, but he dared not approach the house.

The next day he was more fortunate. As he alighted from his cab in the neighborhood, he beheld the housemaid emerging from the gate of Miss Marcell's residence. She approached him and he waited for her. When she came up, he accosted her respectfully, told her his story, she stopped to listen, and finally he offered her five golden sovereigns, with a compliment upon her bright face.

"And what do you want for this money, sir?" the girl asked, saucily, turning the coins over in her hands.

"I want you to tell me where my niece, Miss Rohan, is," said Colonel Brand. "Come, you know where she is. Is she in London? What street? What number?"

"That I couldn't say," replied the girl, coolly. "If I know, it's because I've been trusted, and I am not one to betray a trust, if I am a poor servant. Take your money, sir. And if all we hear be true, you're like to need it one of these fine days. You won't be finding Miss Rohan, not from my telling!"

And tossing the money into the gutter, as if sovereigns were as pebbles in her eyes, the girl walked on, humming a tune.

Colonel Brand chocked with rage. He ordered his

cabman to pick up the money, pocketed it, and returned to his lodgings.

The following week was spent in fruitless wanderings about the street and in watching Miss Marcell's house.

The week after brought new life to the conspirators, for it brought another letter from the mysterious "Ann Jones."

It had been written by the false Miss Bermyngham upon the very day after her memorable interview with Caspar Voe. She had not been too absorbed in plans to avert her own ruin to forget her rival, the lovely Beatrix. It happened upon that morning that Lady Folliott had shown her a letter from Beatrix, with date and address affixed, and even in the midst of her own anxieties and troubles, the impostor had found time, opportunity, and inclination to write a letter to Colonel Brand, which she herself posted at Spalding, whither she went to send her telegraph to her bankers in London.

This letter contained simply the address :

"Miss Beatrix Rohan, residing with Miss McTavish, Bruce Cottage, Durham."

The conspirators exulted over this great good fortune.

"Our mysterious 'Ann Jones' is an active friend," said Mrs. Brand. "She is a lady, although the handwriting looks like that of an ignorant person. Depend upon it, Colonel, this 'Ann Jones' is Miss Bermyngham and she hates Beatrix because Sir Lionel Charlton is in love with Beatrix."

Colonel and Mrs. Brand, accompanied by their efficient son, took the night-mail train for the north.

We have thus briefly summarized the proceedings of

the Brands during the weeks of Beatrix's quiet sojourn at Bruce Cottage.

Upon the very day, however, in which the Brands received the false Miss Bermyngham's letter of betrayal, the monotony of Beatrix's existence was broken by a visit from Sir Lionel Charlton.

It will be remembered that the baronet had given Lady Folliott a promise that he would not avow his love for Beatrix to its object for an entire month. That month of probation had expired upon the day of his departure from Folliott Court. All the soft allurements, the pretty affectations, the little wiles of the false Miss Bermyngham had been wasted upon him. He loved Beatrix with all his heart and soul. Besides her all other women seemed tame and spiritless. And he had come to Durham to beg Beatrix to become his wife. With her marriage, all the persecutions of her relatives would cease forever. She would nevermore be fugitive. He loved her deeply, passionately, devotedly. But all great love is tinctured with humility, and he had come to risk his fate in fear and trembling lest Beatrix should not be able to return his love.

He was rowed from Durham in a boat, and alighted at the foot of the garden and came up the box-bordered, tree-shaded path slowly, his heart beating fast.

In the midst of the garden was a great sycamore tree and a rustic bench stood under it. The hour was early evening, the daylight still lingered and Beatrix wrapped in a white Shetland shawl, sat upon the bench, absorbed in her own thoughts.

She had not heard Sir Lionel's approach, and did not see him until he stood before her.

Then she rose up, with a little glad cry, and her flushing face and glowing eyes brought joy to his heart.

"You are glad to see me, Miss Rohan—Beatrix?" he exclaimed. "How well you are looking!"

He took both her hands in his, pressing them warmly.

"How did you leave Lady Folliott?" asked Beatrix, somewhat shyly.

"She is almost well again. She was quite ill with nervous fever, but drives out daily now."

"And Miss Bermyngham?"

"Is well, I believe. I am come up here to tell you something of great importance, Beatrix," said Sir Lionel, gravely—"at least it is of the utmost importance to me—"

"Colonel Brand has not found out where I am?" cried Beatrix. "You are not come to warn me—to take me away?"

"I do my errand very awkwardly, I fear. No, the Brands have not discovered your refuge, Beatrix," said Sir Lionel, gently. "I am come here to ask you to give me the right to protect you from them always. Beatrix, from the hour I first saw you I have loved you. I am precipitate in my avowal, abrupt, rash even. Perhaps you do not know me well enough yet. Perhaps you cannot love me; but I love you, Beatrix, darling. Will you be my wife?"

The proposal thus made was not all after the plan Sir Lionel had intended. He had mediated a tender, loving appeal to her, a lengthened declaration of his sentiments, but after his gentle beginning the words had come from his lips in a passionate outburst, and he had seized the girl's hand and poured forth his heart in the briefest possible terms.

Beatrix grew pale and tried to withdraw her hand.

"Miss Bermyngham?" she said faintly.

"Is nothing to me. I am nothing to her. Beatrix—"

"But Lady Folliott?" faltered Beatrix.

"My aunt loves you, Beatrix. She will gladly welcome you as her niece. I will not deny that she had made different plans for me, but she is too sensible to endeavor to thwart my happiness. I will promise you a loving welcome from her. Tell me, Beatrix, can you return my love?"

We need not record Beatrix's answer.

She did love Sir Lionel, and the happy young pair lingered late in the garden, until Miss McTavish came out in search of Beatrix.

Sir Lionel informed their hostess of his betrothal, and received her congratulations.

"I intend to take my bride away with me," he said. "I shall not feel safe to leave her here longer. Who knows at what hour her enemies may discover her?"

"I am quite safe here, Lionel," said Beatrix. "And I cannot marry you until you have won Lady Folliott's consent to our union. Go to her to-morrow and tell her all, and if she consents then come for me."

"Beatrix is right," said Miss McTavish. "It would be treacherous to Lady Folliott to marry without her knowledge!"

Sir Lionel was forced to yield to Beatrix and her protectress.

"I will go back to Folliott Court by the first train," he said. "I will return for you in a week, Beatrix. Guard her very carefully, Miss McTavish. I have a strange misgiving. I fear something may happen to wrest my treasure from me."

A little later, he returned to Durham, and took the first train for the southward.

And the next day, the Brands, father, mother, and son, like bloodhounds on the trail, arrived in Durham. They had tracked their prey to her refuge!



CHAPTER XXXIII.

STILL SEEKING REST AND REFUGE.

Sir Lionel Charlton, in the ardor of his passionate love for Beatrix, and in the gloom of their speedy separation after their betrothal, had expressed a misgiving in regard to the girl's future. A sudden gloom, and inexplicable forboding, swift and dark as a moving shadow, had swept over his spirit and had vanished. But no warning of the danger menacing her obscured the new-found happiness of Beatrix for a single instant.

The night that followed Sir Lionel's brief visit to her was radiant with happy thoughts and dreams. The next morning, Beatrix came down to breakfast, her dusk-gray eyes softly luminous, her pure and noble face softly flushed, her beauty and loveliness having a sweeter, tenderer character than usual. Miss McTavish regarded her with admiration, and sighed, perhaps with a retrospective thought of her own lost youth.

They sat down together at the small round table in the pretty dining-room. Miss McTavish talked of Sir Lionel, of Lady Folliott, and of Beatrix's prospects, in the frequent absences of the serving-woman, and during the attendant's presence was equally garrulous upon the subject of the garden, the flowers, her fancy-work,

and similar trifles which yet make up the sum and substance of the lonely spinster's daily life.

After breakfast, when Miss McTavish had washed her old-fashioned pink china and her ancient silver service with her own hands, Beatrix assisting her, and had placed them carefully in the little three-cornered cupboard, with its glass door, in the dining-room, the pair went out into the garden, strolling down the grassy path, as was their morning custom.

"I have green gooseberry jam to make this morning, in the cool of the day, you know," said Miss McTavish, reflectively. "I will trust no one but myself to manufacture my sweetmeats. Then I shall weed my flowers. They begin to need attention. This afternoon I shall finish my point-lace antimacassar. I intended that as a gift for Lady Folliott, but I can make her another, and I should like to give this to you, my dear, for a bridal present. But I lack some point-lace braid. Beatrix, dear, you are so fond of the open air, would you kindly allow Sanders to drive you to Durham in the pony-chaise, and you will match my braid?"

"Certainly," assented Beatrix. "I shall be glad to go."

"You are so obliging always, my dear," said the old lady, in a chirruping way. "If you will also exchange my book at the circulating library, I shall be indebted to you. It is after nine o'clock. I'll order the pony-chaise immediately."

She hastened to do so.

Beatrix retired to her own room, and exchanged her pretty white morning dress, with its ruffles and frills, for a black silk walking-costume. A black straw hat, trimmed with black velvet and white daisies, black gloves, and a blue veil, completed her attire.

She put her purse in her pocket, for she had a few

purchases to make for herself, gave a last glance about the small, chintz-draped chamber, and ran lightly down the stairs.

The pony-chaise was waiting, and Sanders, the gardener, gate-keeper, footman, coachman, and general factotum of the modest little establishment, was in waiting, clad in faded livery, but carrying himself as became a retainer of the ancient family of McTavish. He helped Beatrix into the chaise, handed her the reins, and mounted to his seat behind her, where he sat with folded arms, as straight and immovable as a graven image.

Beatrix thoroughly enjoyed her drive to Durham. Entering the picturesque town, she skilfully guided her homely little cob through the streets, and drew up at last before a shop whose chief interest to her was that it combined a circulating library with its legitimate trade in fancy goods.

Miss McTavish, who was devotedly fond of reading, had given an order for a particular and special work, in three volumes, and nearly half-an-hour was consumed in finding it, and in executing other commissions at the same establishment.

The point-lace was difficult to match, and required considerable shopping. Beatrix drove from place to place, but finally succeeded in obtaining what was required.

The shop-woman at the Ladies' Repository at which Beatrix's purchase was made proceeded to do up the small parcel with considerable painstaking. Beatrix moved to the door and looked out upon the busy street. People were moving past upon the sidewalks; cabs and other vehicles were hurrying over the pavement. She watched them idly. But suddenly she grew pale as death and drew back from the door, catching her breath after the manner of a drowning person.

She had beheld in a slowly passing cab the faces of Colonel Brand and Randall Brand !

She could not be mistaken. The glass in the cab-window was lowered, and Colonel Brand had protruded his head through the opening thus afforded and was hailing his cabman in an angry voice.

The Brands had not seen her. That she knew at once. She watched her false guardian with a fascinated gaze. Apparently satisfied with the response of the cabman, Colonel Brand withdrew his head into the vehicle, and Mrs. Brand was seen leaning forward and looking from the open window. They had come in force. They were all here. They had tracked their hapless quarry to her refuge !

Beatrix turned cold and faint all in an instant. The instinct of flight came upon her with almost irresistible strength. She was tempted to rush out into the streets to hasten to the station, and set out again upon her journeyings, but for the moment her physical weakness held her powerless.

But she had learned self-control in a hard and bitter school. Her experiences at the Chateau Valbeck in Belgium, at the quaint old Flemish inn at Antwerp, at the Hotel de Flandre at Brussels, at the lodging-house in London, at Folliott Court, and afterward, had not been without stern and useful fruit. She had learned a thorough self-reliance, presence of mind in emergencies, and a firmness and resoluteness that would have befitted one of twice her years.

And so, although for the brief space of time we have mentioned she was faint, trembling and frightened, no sooner had the cab containing her enemies passed beyond her sight than she became herself again.

A moment's keen thought sufficed for her plan of action.

She remembered having seen a portmanteau upon the cab. Evidently, the Brands were just arrived. They would probably proceed first of all to a hotel, procure breakfast, make inquiries concerning Miss McTavish, and set out for Bruce Cottage an hour or two hence.

There might be a brief respite for the hunted girl.

"In an hour or two I can surely effect my escape," she thought. "I have to deal with human bloodhounds. I must be 'wise as a serpent.' Now what am I to do?"

Her parcel was ready for her. She approached the counter, still startingly pale, but calm and self-possessed, and asked for a sheet of paper and an envelope. They were furnished her. Withdrawing to a corner, she dashed off a note in the most hurried manner, addressing Miss McTavish, and informing her that the Brands had tracked her out, that she dared not return to Bruce Cottage, and begging Miss McTavish to detain them as long as possible from pursuit.

The shop-woman found a trustworthy messenger for her, and she gave the letter into his possession, adjuring him to proceed with all speed to Bruce Cottage and deliver the letter into Miss McTavish's own hands. A half-sovereign ensured her messenger's best speed and fidelity, and he set out upon his errand at a run.

Beatrix went out to her pony-chaise quietly and took her seat. Sanders ascended to his. Beatrix drew her vail over her face and drove quietly onward out of the town, gaining a pleasant country road to the northward of Durham.

"This is not the way home, Miss," said Sanders, respectfully.

"I know it isn't, Sanders," replied the young lady, quietly. "To what place does this road lead?"

"Why, to North Abbey, ten miles away, but there are hamlets between, Miss."

"Is North Abbey a railway station?"

Sanders replied in the affirmative.

"Then I'll drive there," said Beatrice. "Sanders, you are a trusted old family servant, and Miss McTavish has told you something of my history and bidden you to be on your guard against any strangers who might come to the cottage. The evil she feared has fallen. My enemies are in Durham!"

"Lord save us, Miss—"

"They have tracked me out," said Beatrice, calmly. "Nothing remains to me but flight. I escaped them before; I can escape them again. No doubt they will watch the Durham railway station. One of the Brands will be on guard, with an assistant, doubtless, while the others go to Bruce Cottage. I shall be at North Abbey, if all goes well, before they arrive at the cottage. I have put Miss McTavish on her guard, and I think she can hold them from pursuit for two or three hours at least. By that time I can have attained comparative safety."

"What a speeshal Providence it was that you happened to see them this morning!" cried Sanders, piously. "The Lord watches over his ain, Miss; you can see that. And now ye're going to yer ain freends, eh, Miss?"

"I do not yet know where I shall go. That will all come afterwards. All I can think of now is to get away beyond their reach. I know that I can trust you, Sanders. Miss McTavish has told me long stories of your fidelity and devotion to her."

"You can trust me, Miss. I would die before yer enemies should get a word of information out of my mouth?" cried Sanders, earnestly. "Touch up the cob, Miss. He's got the go in him. Let me lay on the

whip. We'll catch the up-express train from North Abbey as sure as we're living."

Sanders seized the whip and "touched up," the cob, which gave a bound forward and developed a capacity for rapid movement, which, considering his stocky form, was simply astonishing. The road was good. The chaise was wheeled onward briskly, and Beatrix, calm and hopeful, held the reins with steady hands.

They arrived at North Abbey in about an hour and a-half after leaving Durham. The noon-express was on the point of departure. Beatrix had only time to slip a few gold pieces into Sanders' hands, to bid him a hasty good-by, and enter a first-class compartment of a railway-coach before the shrill whistle sounded. She leaned back in her seat, noting that she had the compartment all to herself. The train began to move, and Beatrix put her face to the open window just in time to see Sanders, who was running up, breathless, flushed, and apoplectic-looking, and extending to her in one hand a railway ticket, which Beatrix had not purchased, believing that there was not time enough to do so.

She took the pasteboard from his hand, expressed her thanks, waved him an adieu, and the train moved on, bearing her to the northward.

She had not even known whither the train was bound. Her ticket was for South Shields, she discovered upon examination.

The journey was not a long one, and was performed in safety, without event.

Alighting at her destination, she procured a cab and drove to a quiet little inn. Here she obtained a Bradshaw's guide, and studied it attentively. Armed with the information it afforded her, she went out into the streets, made her way to the river and crossed the

steam ferry to North Shields, keeping her face carefully veiled.

At North Shields she found her way down to the docks. There were many vessels to be seen, most of them rough and black and dingy-looking, even to the sails, colliers for the most part ; and Beatrix turned her eyes from them, seeking something entirely different.

Mrs. Talcott's plan of procedure, after they had quitted Folliott Court, and the success that had attended it, had impressed upon Beatrix the necessity of exercising the utmost caution and guardedness.

She dared not remain at North or South Shields, or even at Newcastle. She dared not proceed thence by rail, lest her enemies should trace her out. A steamer seemed to her to afford the best chance of escape, and she sought for one, not caring what might be its destination.

A screw steamer from Newcastle, laden with coals, lay out in the stream, sending off steam in short, impatient puffs. She looked clean and wholesome. A few women and men, evidently passengers, were on her decks. Beatrix looked at them wistfully. While she looked, the steamer sent a boat ashore, and Beatrix noticed a little group of people standing near her, who were evidently expecting to enter it.

She ventured to approach one of these persons, a poor, careworn looking woman with a baby in her arms, and ask her if she were intending to take passage on the steamer.

"Ay," replied the woman. "It is cheaper than the rail. The collier-steamers are not so dirty as you'd think."

"And where are you going?" asked Beatrix.

"To Lunnon, Miss."

Beatrix remembered having heard that a great

town is a more perfect wilderness to hide in than any other place on earth. Would she not be safe in London? Of course, she could not return to Mrs. Pinnet's, since Colonel Brand might look for her there; but in all the vast metropolis she could surely find some safe and pleasant lodging, from which she might write to Sir Lionel Charlton, and to which he could come for her.

The boat came up to the landing, and when the group of waiting people had entered it, Beatrix followed them in silence, and was taken with them out to the vessel.

The accommodations offered her were not of the best, but she had no thought for discomforts. She remained on deck, keeping near to the little faded woman to whom she had spoken. The passengers had brought their own provisions, Beatrix was not provided with stores of any description. Upon inquiry, she discovered that she could obtain a frugal supply on board, and accordingly bought and paid for some ship-biscuit, which constituted her entire provision for the voyage.

Before the night fell the steamer had passed Tyne-mouth, and was well out at sea. That night Beatrix spent upon the deck, in the soft starlight and fresh air, being unable to go below to her crowded quarters and narrow berth. She slept a little, and awoke in the morning considerably refreshed and strengthened.

The next day was dull and monotonous. The ceaseless grinding sound of the great iron screw, the misery of her poor fellow-passengers, and her own desperate straits, made the day a hard one to poor Beatrix.

Yet they did not arrive in London until the afternoon of the day thereafter.

Upon landing, Beatrix found herself at a coal-wharf. No cabs were to be seen. A sixpence bestowed upon a barefooted lad who was lounging upon the wharf sent him in search of one. The girl's fellow-passengers

straggled ashore on foot. She waited for a cab, and when it arrived, ordered the cabman to take her to the Waterloo railway-station.

Upon arriving at her destination, Beatrice dismissed him, and when he had vanished, took another cab to Euston Square.

Here, in the eating-room of the station, she procured a cup of coffee and a tolerable supper.

She had formed her plans with great deliberation during her long voyage from Tynemouth to London. She had resolved not to remain in town, where her unprotected situation would attract attention to her. The Brands would be in London, and she would be afraid to venture into the streets, lest they should find her.

She had still in her possession the letter of introduction to Mr. Trevor, of Penmawr, Montgomeryshire, North Wales, which had been given her by Mrs. Trevor, the lady whom she had befriended in Brussels, and who had in turn rendered her such signal service. She resolved to present that letter in person. No one would look for her in Wales.

She procured a ticket for Chester, and took the night train for that place.

She arrived early the next morning at the quaint old town, and changed cars for Rhuabon. Thence she went on to Corwen and to Bala, in Merionethshire, alighting at the latter station.

She found a fly—a rickety old vehicle, drawn by two stout Welsh ponies—and engaged it for her use. Its driver informed her, in reply to her questions, that Penmawr was ten or twelve miles distant, over the Berwyn mountains; that the roads were rugged and difficult; but that he thought he could take her to her destination before nightfall.

It was thus that Beatrix set out upon the last stage of her hard and eventful journey.

“What reception shall I meet from these strangers?” she asked herself, with bitter forebodings, as she left the town of Bala behind her. “It is weeks, months, since Mrs. Trevor gave me that letter. Perhaps my delay in presenting it may prejudice them against me. Perhaps they are no longer at Penmawr. My future looks gloomy. As to the past, have I covered my steps well during this last flight? Will my enemies trace me out again, with their superhuman cunning? Are they at this moment following swift upon my track?”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LILIAS'S ENEMY SILENCED.

It was the night and the hour appointed for the meeting between Caspar Voe and the guilty woman who was known at Folliott Court as Miss Bermyngham.

The night was filled with the soft light of golden stars. The air was sweet and balmy, laden with the stolen fragrance of the gardens. At the rendezvous appointed, in the midst of the park, among the shadows that here held their court of gloom, Caspar Voe walked to and fro impatiently, a black scowl upon his scarred forehead, his single eye glowing like a coal, an expression of the keenest vigilance upon his hideous features.

“Why don't she come?” he said to himself, in a tone of annoyance. “How dare she keep me waiting? When one's neck is in danger, one should be prompt to

propitiate him who holds the hangman's rope in his hands !”

He listened, pausing, and peering through the darkness under the densely-leaved trees.

“Still no sign of her approach !” he muttered presently. “Can she mean to show me that she is not alarmed ? Can she mean to defy me ? Can she mean treachery ?”

With an instinctive movement, he thrust one hand into his breast, clutching a revolver which he had hidden there. Knowing so well the woman with whom he had to deal, he had come to the interview duly armed and prepared for treachery.

He was about to resume his walk, when he beheld a shadow flitting along the dim aisle under the trees and approaching him swiftly from the direction of the Court.

Retreating a few steps, he concealed himself behind the trunk of a great oak tree, and waited.

The figure came nearer and nearer, and at length emerged into the open glade, in the center of which was the great fountain. Here the figure paused uncertainly. It was completely shrouded in a black waterproof cloak, the hood drawn closely over its head, and its identity could scarcely be determined in the darkness.

But Gaspar Voe knew as well as he knew himself, the soft, half-frightened voice which now called his name in a quick, low voice, and he came forth from his concealment, answering :

“Here I am, Lilius. Why are you so late ?”

The girl moved nearer to him, as if frightened at the darkness and loneliness of the scene. Her hood, which she had held together with one hand under her chin, fell back, revealing the crimps and waves of her high-coiffed blonde hair. A stray gleam of starlight rested upon her pretty pink-and-white face, and showed her

black eyes, usually so downcast, now uplifted with a wild appealing in their depths, and a tremulous quiver about the red mouth with its grieving childish lips.

Standing thus, with the pale gleam of light falling upon her face, she made a picture that might have touched the hardest heart.

But it did not touch the heart of Caspar Voe. He only laughed mockingly and with a savage sort of a sneer.

"You play that well, Lilias," he said coolly. "You always did the ingénue business well. You were a born actress, and I wonder that you didn't make more of a mark upon the stage. But I have been behind the scenes too much to admire this sort of thing. I really think I prefer to see you in your real character—the wicked, unscrupulous, revengeful, and bad woman, because in that you are genuine. So lay aside this pussy-cat purring, Lilias. I mean business!"

A hard look passed over the impostor's face, as she answered calmly, and in a tone devoid of those pretty affectations that had seemed to belong to her as second nature :

"And so I mean business! Did you come here alone, Caspar Voe?" and she peered around her inquisitively. "If you have brought an officer, or a spy to overhear us, I shall go at once!"

"You are so treacherous yourself that you suspect every one else of treachery," declared Voe. "I have brought no officer or spy. I came alone."

The woman knew from his tones that he told the truth.

"Did—did you tell any one where you were coming?" she asked, as if nervously. "Have you in any way betrayed to any one whom you were to meet to night, or that you had an appointment with any one?"

"I did not. The people at the inn believe that I am

in my own room, abed and asleep. I left my room by the window, climbing out over a shed and sliding to the ground. I have kept our appointment a profound secret, as I agreed to."

And again the woman knew that he told the truth. A sudden gleam, as of a new-kindled spark, appeared in her black eyes. The man noticed it, and continued carelessly :

"As I said, no one at the inn knows anything about my business. I came out secretly and by stealth. But I knew with whom I had to deal, and I came prepared to defend myself. Look at that !"

He drew out his revolver and exhibited it to her.

She sprang back, with a little cry of affected terror.

"Oh, Caspar," she cried, "do you doubt me like that? Do you think me capable of doing you harm?"

"Why shouldn't I think so? You attacked me once when I was helplessly drunk, bound me hand and foot, gashed my face and breast, gouged out my eye and left me for dead. Why should you not be capable of doing me harm when you killed your own little, innocent, sleeping child?"

"Oh! don't, don't!" cried the woman, putting her hand over her eyes, as if to shut out a horrible vision. "I was mad then! I was mad! Why else should I have destroyed him? You drove me to it, Caspar. Your drunkenness and idleness drove me out of my senses!"

"Oh, yes, 'the man tempted me,'" sneered Voe. "Other women have idle and drunken husbands, but they don't kill their innocent children, nor stab their husbands in their sleep! The trouble was as much in you as in me. You were a false, bad wife, fond of dress, and luxury, and admiration, and the child and I stood in your way. But for that burst of fury that

night, you would have quietly poisoned us both, instead of stabbing us. The bowl would have befitted your character better than the knife, although my pretty tiger-cat, you can give a blow promptly enough when you choose."

"Heap reproaches and sneers upon me, Caspar!" said the woman, with assumed meekness. "I deserve all you can say!"

"And a great deal more!" said Voe coolly. "You are a keen one, Lilias. You have done well for yourself, I must say. The cuckoo is in the dove's nest and passes for the dove. Your actress education stands you in good stead here! But tell me—did you kill Miss Bermyngham?"

"Did I not tell you she died of heart-disease? She died a natural death—"

"Permit me to doubt it. You gave her some subtle poison, perhaps. Her death was too opportune to be an accident. And how readily you slipped into her place and forced your own assumed indentity upon her dead body! You must have stripped her corpse of its money and jewels, unless you robbed her while she was yet living!"

"I tell you I never harmed her. I never had a thought of harming her. But when she died there in the coach so suddenly and awfully, right before my eyes, what could I do other than I did? If I had declared who she really was, I might have brought suspicion upon myself. In the quickness of a flash I saw that I might slip into her place and be lost to my enemies. I supposed they would make inquiries at the London station, if any one suspected me of being Agatha Walden; and, finding Agatha Walden dead, I supposed all pursuit would stop there."

"And so it might, but that I obtained the address of

Miss Bermyngham of her former servant in Calcutta, and did not pause to make inquiries in London, but came on directly to Folliott Court. Has no one ever suspected that you may be an impostor?"

"No one. How should they suspect? Miss Bermyngham went out to India in her early childhood. She was kept in the nursery while on the brief visit here long ago, and all that any one remembered of her was that she was blonde."

"And you are blonde. But about the eyes? Yours are hard and black. What were hers?"

It suited the false Miss Bermyngham to lead Caspar Voe into conversation. She had a terrible purpose in view and wanted time to screw up her courage "to the sticking point." The longer she could put off the moment of action the better for her. She hoped to throw her enemy off his guard and to take advantage of his possible momentary self-forgetfulness. Therefore she answered :

"Her eyes were pale blue, those light eyes that have no brightness nor beauty. She was an insignificant-looking creature, and Lady Folliott would never had any pride in her. I make a much better Miss Bermyngham than she did!"

"As vain as ever, I see," said Caspar Voe, smiling sneeringly. "But I don't see how Lady Folliott can accept black eyes in place of blue."

"I take care that she don't see mine. And a down-cast look is so shy and modest that it is considered a beauty in me. And then, fortunately, Miss Bermyngham's mother had dark eyes, so that Lady Folliott does not perplex herself upon the subject. She was a little surprised at first—she owned it—to find that my eyes were not blue, but I easily dissipated her surprise."

"But have you no difficulty with your maid? She must know that your hair is dyed."

"I think she does not know it. She is near-sighted. If she knew it, she wouldn't dare tell. I know things about her that won't bear raking up. She is wanted in Paris, you see, and she is only too thankful for a safe refuge in a secluded country-house."

"You are cleverer even than I fancied, Lilias," said Voe, admiringly. "Pity you have the heart of a demon. You might have made something of yourself, Lilias—"

"Don't preach to me," interrupted the impostor, imperiously. "I won't listen to it. Your own life has not been so much better than mine—"

"But I never committed murder!"

The woman was silent but her eyes burned like wreckers' fires, and a dangerous look appeared on her painted face.

"I had hard work enough to get out to-night," she said, after a pause, in an altered voice. "Lady Folliott stayed later than usual in the drawing-room, and I thought that I should never be rid of her. I had to change my dress afterwards, and slip out through the conservatory, the other doors being locked. It's all a risk, you see. If I should be seen to enter the house at this hour, what would Lady Folliott think? So, as I have so many extra anxieties of my own, Caspar, we will cut our interview short. Hark! Is not that some one coming?"

They listened, but Voe declared he had heard nothing.

The impostor's start and exclamation were but a bit of acting. They were well done, for they deceived her enemy. In truth, she heard no sound, and did not fancy that she heard any.

"I am sure that some one is approaching," she said,

with pretended nervousness, looking around her and shrinking a little nearer to him. "What if I have been watched? followed? I feel as if eyes were peering upon us from the gloom around us. I am afraid. Let us go further into the park. It may be only a keeper who is out late, but I must not be seen here!"

She drew her hood over her head and moved away. Voe followed her.

"We will not go far," he said. "I don't believe any one is coming."

"You are sure that it is not some one who has followed you from the inn?"

"Perfectly sure. How could any one follow me when no one knows that I have left my room?"

"Yes, I forgot. I am not myself to-night. This meeting with you has made me strangely nervous. I can't help but think some one is watching us. And yet I came out as secretly as you. Besides, who should watch me? No one suspects that I am not what I seem—no one on earth but you! That is," she added artfully, "unless you have told some one of your suspicions concerning me!"

"I have told no one. No one on earth besides myself suspects that Miss Bermyngham of Folliott Court is Lilius Voe, the murderess."

"No one?" said the woman, trying to hide her eagerness. "No one?"

"No one!"

"And no one shares your suspicions concerning the identity of Lilius Voe with Agatha Walden?" cried the woman, her eyes sparkling.

"I did not say that. Do you remember my cousin, Gordon Hyslop?"

"Remember him? Your boon-companion, a card-sharper, a man who lives by his wits, and who was

always wanting to borrow money, even of me—remember him? I should think I did?”

“He came to England with me. His mother sent him money to fetch him home. I told him of my suspicions about Agatha Walden, but I told no one else. I could trust Gordon. By heaven! He hates you, Lilias. You treated him badly enough, shutting your door on him, you know, and refusing to recognize him.”

“And he only knows your suspicions regarding Agatha Walden? Nothing more?”

“Nothing more.”

The woman pushed forward in silence.

“Do you know, Lilias, that I should be half inclined to fear you if you were not so small and frail-looking?” said Voe, after a little with a hoarse laugh. “You have got determination enough to fill a bigger and stronger body. You can attack drunken helpless men or sleeping babies, but badly as you hate and fear me, you know now that I am your master. But why do you go so far? I won’t stir a step further.”

He halted abruptly, and the woman came also to a standstill.

They were in a lonely portion of the park, in the midst of thick underbrush, and under a dense mass of foliage. Trees were all about them, growing thickly. Only a few rays of starlight penetrated through the rifts among the branches, and fell upon them and the green turf at their feet.

“We are safe enough here. No one has followed us,” said Voe. “A guilty conscience makes its owner timid as a hare; but you were always a coward, Lilias. Let us come to business. Have you brought the money and jewels?”

“The money? You have little idea of money if you think I can carry ten thousand pounds in gold about my

person," replied the impostor. "That sum would weigh two or three hundred pounds avoirdupois. I brought the ten thousand pounds, however, in Bank of England notes. My messenger arrived with them from London to-day."

"Bank-notes! I hate bank-notes in such a case. The numbers are all taken down; they are easily traced—"

"Well, what of that, if you don't mean to betray me?" demanded the woman.

But this was precisely what Caspar Voe intended to do. He meant to secure his hush-money, and then give her up to the law. As she would be proved to be Lilius Voe, and not Miss Bermyngham, she would have no right to pay away Miss Bermyngham's money. Her agent would testify to the numbers of the bank-notes, and he would be compelled to refund them. They were likely to make him trouble. Yet he decided to take them and hide them away carefully, with a view to possible future use.

"Bank-notes are ticklish property, unless you can prove how you came by them," he said aloud. "But give them to me!"

The woman produced a large packet which she placed in his hands. He saw that it was sealed, and stamped, and marked. He tore open one end of it, and saw that it contained Bank of England notes.

"I haven't opened it," said the woman. "The agent said the notes were all of large denomination. He supposed that I was about to purchase some landed property—"

"Never mind what he supposed. Where are the jewels? Miss Bermyngham, being such a great heiress and living nearly all her life in India, must have had some splendid jewels. Where are they?"

"Here !" and the impostor exhibited a Russia leather hand-bag which she had secured to her belt. "I took them out of their cases and dropped them in all here. See ! They are worth four times as much as the bank-notes !"

"Forty thousand pounds ! Let me see them !"

Voe snatched the bag and pulled it open, thrusting in one hand and holding up a portion of the jewels to the faint starlight. There were necklaces, bracelets, brooches, and ear-drops, besides eigrettes and rings and other ornaments, and there were big pellucid diamonds like drops of fire ; pigeons' blood rubies ; of sapphires ; topazes, yellow as if solidified sunshine ; and great green emeralds of cool lustre and remarkable beauty. The dim light was insufficient. Voe struck a fusee, and contemplated his splendid prize with gloating eye.

"These glittering baubles could be sold, gem by gem, in any city of the world, with the exterior I should put on, and excite no comment from any one," thought Casper Voe. "The money, I fancy, will prove useless to me, but here is wealth. I can live in luxury all my life. I can establish myself as a gentleman. I can buy an estate, if I choose. Yes, I have done well. I'll go away and hide these trinkets. I'll give Lillias three days of fancied security. And then the jewels safely hidden, I'll deliver her up to the officers of justice and she shall swing for her crimes !"

He was thus busy with his thoughts, his single eye riveted upon the bag full of gems, for the moment oblivious of his companion.

But she, guilty and apprehensive, reading his intentions regarding herself, knowing that her very life was threatened by this sword of Damocles, which might fall at any moment, was on the alert !

Drawing a dagger from beneath her cloak—a little jeweled dagger of Indian manufacture, which had belonged to the late Mr. Bermyngham, and which Miss Bermyngham had brought to England among her effects—she held it in the shadow, in a position to strike.

And, as Caspar Voe lighted his third fusee and bent his head lower over his treasure, leaving his breast unguarded, the woman swooped forward with the quickness of a flash and plunged the dagger to the hilt in his breast.

The bag dropped from his hands, which flew to his bosom, and groped there feebly for his revolver. His single eye flamed up with a sudden and awful fire; an awful imprecation trembled on his lips. But as the woman, who had retained her hold upon the dagger, drew the weapon swiftly from its sheath within his heart, the blood gushed forth in one great jet, and he fell forward on his face.

The woman sprang backward several paces.

How still he was! How still the night was? Still? No, there were a thousand sounds. The fall of water somewhere near, the rustling of leaves, the swaying of branches, the calling of night-birds, the rushing of a hare through the undergrowth, the movement of a deer—the night was full of sounds. And she had thought it still!

She was panic-stricken, overcome with terror, trembling with cowardly fears. He did not stir. Was he dead? She forced herself to creep forward to his side. The bag of jewels was in her way. She paused to pick it up and examine it, even then. No drop of blood was upon it. She secured the bag again to her belt with a little sigh of relief, and bent over her enemy.

He lay on his face. There was a singular immova-

bility about his figure, a growing rigidity. She exerted all her strength, and turned his face upward.

The one eye was wide open, and glazed, and set. The scarred and hideous visage was white and awful. The lower jaw was fallen. He was dead.

The woman put her hand above his heart. Assuring herself that it had forever ceased to beat, she took from him the packet of bank-notes. They were unstained. She secured them about her person, ascertained that no drop of blood was upon her garments, and then picked up the dagger which she had thrown from her, and sidled away from the spot, her glances turning backwards upon the horrible object upon the green sward.

She threw the dagger as far out as possible in the little lake to which she now hastened, and waited until it had disappeared.

"Now I am safe!" she whispered to herself, hollowly. "Safe! Perfectly safe! I am rid of my enemy!"

As silently as a cat, but with a frightful burden of guilt upon her wicked soul, she crept towards the gray old mansion, starting at every sound, and looking behind her at every moment with ghastly fancy that the spirit of her murdered enemy was at her back!

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR LIONEL'S VICTORY.

Upon the morning subsequent to the perpetration of the awful crime we have narrated in the preceding chapter, the false Miss Bermyngham came down to breakfast a little late, but exhibiting no signs of the awful experience of the previous night.

If her hard black eyes were haggard, the down-dropped lids concealed them. What might have been the natural color of her face upon that morning cannot be known, for the pearl and pink enamel effectually concealed the skin beneath. She was dressed in a white breakfast robe, all puffs and frills of real old lace, with blue ribbons girdling her waist, and dotting her dress here and there, at the neck, on the sleeves, and upon the skirt. A blue bow nestled amid the crimps and puffs of her red-gold hair, and blue bows ornamented the blue kid slippers encasing her small feet. She looked very fair and dainty to Lady Folliott, who kissed her with a yearning sort of tenderness, and said affectionately:

“How fresh you look, Nerea, darling—as if you had not a care in the world!”

“And I have none—save one!” said the impostor, speaking the last words as to herself. “Dear Aunt Folliott, you are so good to me. Surely, I ought to be the happiest girl in the world?”

The guilty woman, so pure and childlike in her seeming, so black at heart, without a shadow of remorse for the crime she had committed darkening her spirit, was very gay at the breakfast-table, full of chatter, far more lively and animated than usual, but she listened intently for every sound. She expected with every instant that some panic-stricken servant would rush in with the announcement of the discovery of a dead body in the park, and she was all ready to play her part in the scene that must follow.

But no such announcement was made. The quiet of the old mansion was not disturbed by the expected cries of wonder and horror. The ladies adjourned to the morning-room. Lady Folliott took up her work. The impostor moved restlessly to and fro, now touching the

keys of the piano, now picking up a book, and again looking from the windows with a horrible expectancy.

The morning passed without event, save that the ladies dressed and went out to drive. They passed through the village of Folliott Fens, and returned through the park. And still no alarm had been raised—the body of Caspar Voe had not yet been discovered.

Unable to maintain her apparent interest in trifling occupations, the false Miss Bermyngham remained in her own room throughout the afternoon. She kept her maid in close attendance upon her, affecting a headache, but she declared herself sufficiently well to make a superb toilet for dinner. She had restored her jewels, after her return from the park upon the previous night, to her jewel cases, and had placed her packet of money in her desk. No trace remained of that fateful night-excursion, so far as her possessions were concerned.

She robed herself in a dinner-dress of white organdy, over pale blue silk, and adorned herself with a full parure of Oriental pearls, which had been among the treasures she had bestowed upon Caspar Voe. A little shudder went through her frame as she attached the milk-white spheres to her ears and wound the coils of pearls around her throat. Did those clinging strands suggest to her the pressure of the hangman's rope? A little quiver convulsed her rose-red mouth; a little trembling seized upon her eyelids; but the face, with its enamelling, was always impassive in its prettiness and fixed in its coloring, but for eyes and mouth seeming the face of a picture. It was scarcely possible to judge from her features the nature of her thoughts.

She descended to the drawing-room, finding Lady Folliott there awaiting her.

"I have news for you, Nerea!" cried the baroness, as she entered. "Guess what it is!"

The impostor started. Had the body of her victim been discovered?

"I am not good at guessing," she forced herself to answer, with a sickly smile. "Has anything happened?"

"How strangely your voice sounds, Nerea! You must have caught cold. As you cannot guess my news, dear, I must tell you. I have had a telegram from Lion. He will be here to-night."

The impostor drew a long breath of relief. The hour of discovery of that ghastly object in the thicket of the park was still deferred then.

"To-night!" she echoed, scarcely knowing what she said.

"To-night. I have sent a carriage to Spalding, to meet him. You are dressed early. We have still an hour before dinner, as I have had the dinner put back a half-hour. Lion will be here to dine with us."

The false Miss Bermyngham stole a glance at her reflection in an opposite mirror.

"You look very lovely, dear," said the baroness, noting her glance. "As sweet and pretty as any fairy. I think—I am quite sure—that I know to what to attribute Lionel's speedy return," and she smiled on her supposed niece. "We shall soon see, dear."

Sir Lionel Charlton's errand was scarcely what she supposed.

He arrived as expected, and Lady Folliott overwhelmed him with her delighted welcome. The impostor, in her role of ingénue, was shy and smiling, confused and pleased, all at once, dropping her eyelids even lower than usual, and exhibiting a self-consciousness which could not fail to attract the attention of our hero.

Dinner was served at the hour appointed, Sir Lionel

having time for his toilet before the meal was announced.

After dinner, the false Miss Bermyngham played upon the piano, conversed a little, and as soon as tea had been served at half-past ten withdrew to her own rooms for the night.

"Strange that the body has not been found yet," she thought, as she entered her dressing-room. "I am glad it has not been, and sorry too. I dread the discovery, yet I wish it were over. To be sure, that corner of the park is seldom visited, yet the keepers should have been there. What does Sir Lionel want?" the current of her thoughts changing abruptly. "He has not come to propose for me, as Lady Folliott fancies. There was no love for me in his eyes. Perhaps those Brands have carried off Beatrix again and he has discovered my betrayal of her and—oh, impossible! But what can he want?"

The young baronet was at that very moment unfolding his errand to his relative.

He had drawn his chair up to her own. His dark and handsome face was full of tenderness and feeling. He took one of her ladyship's hands in his own, and said, gravely:

"Aunt Folliott, can you guess why I am returned?"

"Is it about Nerea?" asked Lady Folliott, coming to the point at once. "Oh, Lion, have you discovered Nerea's sweetness and purity and loveliness for yourself? Have you come to make me happy by telling me that you desire to carry out my plans?"

The young baronet's face became graver. His black eyes had a deeper shadow in them as he replied:

"Aunt Folliott, you married for love; why should you desire Nerea and me to contract a marriage of convenience!"

"Why should not your union with her be one of affection, Lion?" asked the baroness, gently.

"Because we do not love each other, Aunt Folliott," and Sir Lionel smiled.

"Why can you not love Nerea? Why are men's hearts so perverse?" sighed Lady Folliott, her hopes falling. "Is she not sweet, artless, lovely, pretty?"

Sir Lionel was silent.

"I demand an answer, Lionel," said the lady, with some severity. "Is she not all that I have said?"

"She is certainly very pretty—"

"And artless and good and lovely? Answer me, Lionel. I insist upon an answer."

"Then, at the risk of offending you, Aunt Folliott," said Sir Lionel, "I must confess that Miss Bermyngham does not seem to me to be what you describe her."

"Lionel! What do you mean? Explain yourself!"

"You force me to tell you, Aunt Folliott. Well, then, I have changed my early opinion of Miss Bermyngham. I think her artificial, instead of artless. She does not seem to me lovely. She is pretty, I have granted that, but, dear Aunt Folliott, hers is not the face that I would like to see at the head of my table throughout my life. Have you noticed that the color never comes and goes on her cheeks? That she never looks one square in the face! I do not like her little affectations. She is not well-educated, despite the money and care which Uncle Miles lavished upon her education; she is incapable of actual, earnest thought; she has no actual accomplishments, such as befit a young lady of her wealth and station; she is shallow, vain, ignorant, a worshipper of dress—"

A sharp pang wrung Lady Folliott's heart. Her

features were suddenly convulsed with a look of pain. She was an eminently just woman, and she knew that Sir Lionel had told the truth. Despite her affection for the false Nerea, she could not blind her eyes to the facts when they were thus set before her.

Yet she interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"Lionel," she said, "you are speaking of the nearest relative I have in the world—of my own dead sister's child—of the girl whom I have adopted into my affections as my own child! I cannot bear to hear your harsh judgment upon her. If she is not accomplished, remember that she has inherited her father's heart-disease, and that her physical weakness may have prevented application to her studies. Child as she is in many things, she has a warm, loving heart. I wish I could see her your wife, Lionel."

"That is impossible."

"You utterly refuse to comply with my wishes, then?"

"I must refuse to do violence to my own heart: I must refuse to wrong the heart that I have won to trust in me," said Sir Lionel, very gravely. "Aunt Folliott, you have told me of your plans for adding the Folliott estates to the Bermyngham property. I do not want your wealth. Give it all to Nerea when you no longer have need of it—which Heaven grant may be long, long years hence—but do not take your affection from me. You have been a mother to me, since my mother died. I have never missed her, Aunt Folliott, having your tenderness and constant kindness, your gentle, watchful care, your motherly affection. Do not take these from me, even if in this one thing I must go counter to your wishes."

He raised her hand to his lips. Her face quivered and grew pale.

"My month of probation expired the day I left Folliott Court," said Sir Lionel, after a brief pause. "Aunt Folliott, I have been to Durham. I have seen Beatrice."

Still Lady Folliott was silent.

"I told her of my love for her," resumed the young baronet. "She loves me also. But she has refused to marry me without your consent. Aunt Folliott, will you not grant it?"

"How can I?" cried the baroness. "Oh, my poor Nerea! Lionel, must this thing be? Will you not give up Beatrice—not even for me!"

"Not even for you, my more than mother," said Sir Lionel, affectionately, but with a gentle firmness that was like a rock. "I love her with all my soul. Give her up—the sunshine that has come to glorify my life? Never—never! You could not ask it. Tell me, Aunt Folliott, is not Beatrice more beautiful than Nerea?"

"Oh, yes, a thousand times!" said the baroness, readily.

"Is she not more noble of nature?"

"Yes, I grant that."

"Is she not sweeter?"

The baroness hesitated.

"She has not the insipid sweetness of Nerea," said Beatrice's lover, "but she has a rarer, better sweetness, a pure, calm, and even temperament, a nature incapable of anything petty or ignoble—in short, a grand, sweet nature, sound and pure to the core."

"She has all that," acknowledged the baroness.

"Is she not more accomplished than Nerea? Better educated? Has she not a greater intellect, a stronger mind? Is she not better bred? Does she not exhibit that high-breeding which distinguishes the highest classes, and which Nerea lacks?"

"I grant all this ; but why do you disparage Nerea, Lionel?"

"I merely wished to show to you that Beatrix is Nerea's superior a thousand fold. I wanted to show you that this fugitive girl is worthy a place in your heart—ah, she had won that for herself—and in your family. I wanted you to do full justice to Beatrix in every respect. You acknowledge her to be all that I have said. Dear Aunt Folliott, will you not consent to accept her as your niece?"

"Lionel, you break my heart. I have told my plans to Nerea. Suppose—I only say suppose—that she has become interested in you. Your marriage might, in such case, break her heart."

"Impossible! Nerea can become interested in no one but herself. Her heart is not so tender as you think. You frighten yourself with a chimera, Aunt Folliott. Nerea loves no one but herself."

Lady Folliott sighed heavily. She could not betray the secret of the false Nerea's avowed love for Sir Lionel. All her womanly instincts impelled her to shield her supposed niece from the pity of even the young baronet. No, she could not tell him that the girl had said she loved him. She could not tell him of the girl's pretended heart-disease, and implore him to marry her to preserve her life.

She had no blame for Sir Lionel for not falling into her plans. She was eminently just. She knew that, if he loved Beatrix and if Beatrix returned his love, his marriage to Beatrix must follow. But she blamed herself for having revealed her wishes to the impostor—blamed herself with a fierce and unreasoning anger and grief. If Nerea were to die of unrequited love, she said to herself, she—Lady Folliott—she only—was to blame!

Even in her distress she could not help but do justice to Beatrix. The girl had won her heart. She believed, in her own soul, that Beatrix was very much dearer to her than was her supposed niece, and blamed herself accordingly.

"I have been very wrong, Lionel," she said at last, her proud face shadowed deeply. "I am sorry that you ever met Beatrix. I am sorry that you have not fallen in love with Nerea. According to the announcement I long ago made to you, my property will go to that one of you who does not decline this marriage. As it now turns out, Folliott Court will go to Nerea."

"Very well, Aunt Folliott, so that you give you consent to my marriage with Beatrix and give us also your kind wishes and some little portion of your affection," said Sir Lionel, cheerfully.

"Beatrix has a great fortune, Lionel. Your estate is encumbered and you will have to live on a mere pittance for the next ten years if you desire to clear your property. Have you thought that people will call you a fortune-hunter?"

The young baronet's cheeks flushed.

"Beatrix would be the same to me if she were a beggar," he answered. "What does it matter what the gossips say?"

"You are resolved to marry her? I can say nothing to make you change your mind?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever. But we want your consent to make us happy," said Sir Lionel, in the old boyish, coaxing way she so well remembered. "Think of her, pursued by unrelenting enemies, with a year before her in which she must play hide and seek with them, and almost inevitably fall into their clutches unless this barrier of a marriage is raised up between her and them. Once she is married they become

powerless ! Aunt Folliott, have I your consent to bring Beatrix here as my wife ?”

The baroness was silent for a brief space, thinking of her supposed niece ; then she said, tremulously :

“ Yes, Lionel ; you have my consent to your marriage. Bring Beatrix here as your wife as soon as may be. I have been wrong, but I will be wrong no longer. May God bless you both, even as I bless you !”

She kissed him and embraced him, and then hurried away to her own rooms. A little later, when she had grown calmer, she made her way to the chamber of the false Miss Bermyngham, resolved to tell her the whole truth before she slept.

She found the impostor still up in her dressing-room, attired in her dressing-gown. At Lady Folliott's entrance the false Miss Bermyngham dismissed her maid, and the two were left to themselves.

The impostor saw that the baroness had been weeping—that something had happened.

“ What is the matter ?” she asked, in a startled voice. “ I did not hear anything—”

Lady Folliott, with great tenderness and gentleness, told the girl the story she had come to tell. The false Miss Bermyngham heard it with bitterness and anger, but without any display of her supposed malady, and without any actual grief, as the baroness saw with surprise.

“ I must say that Sir Lionel has wretched taste to prefer Beatrix to me,” said the impostor, confident in her own mind that by this time her hated rival was safe within the power and keeping of her enemies, and that her own cause was by no means lost. “ Don't trouble about me, Aunt Folliott. It will all come out right yet, and if it don't I'll marry a peer, see if I don't. After all, why should I throw myself away on a beggarly com-

moner when I might marry a peer? We'll spend next season in town, and then you'll find out whether your little Nerea is attractive or not to others."

Lady Folliott returned to her own chambers, greatly relieved, but as greatly perplexed.

The next morning the false Miss Bermyngham went down to the breakfast-room at the usual hour, resolved to treat Sir Lionel as if nothing had occurred, but she discovered that he had left Folliott Court at daybreak to catch the morning train from Spalding, being all eagerness to return to Durham and Beatrix.

Lady Folliott looked at the girl narrowly, but saw no signs of her having passed a sleepless night. To the contrary, the impostor looked unusually fresh and charming. In the greater horror occupying her thoughts, the girl had little thought for Sir Lionel, but even the greater horror had not kept her sleepless!

After breakfast, as usual, they went to the morning room. Lady Folliott took up a newly-arrived newspaper: the impostor walked to and fro in an idle, desultory fashion, her heart consumed with its own evil passions.

Suddenly, a great cry sounded from without. The baroness dropped her paper in alarm. The girl stood still, with wide-open staring eyes and hands uplifted as if to ward off a blow.

"What is it?" asked the baroness.

The answer came unexpectedly, from the lips of the land-steward, who came rushing in, white and scared, exclaiming:

"My lady, there's been a dead body found in the park! The body of a man who has been murdered!"



CHAPTER XXXVI.

TREVOR FARM.

Trevor Farm, in Montgomeryshire, North Wales, was in the very shadow of the Bermyn mountains, and comprised some three hundred acres of hill and dale, fields and pastures, all under the highest state of cultivation possible to the somewhat stony soil.

The house was a long, quaint, old-fashioned farmhouse, with mullioned windows set with diamond panes a deep stone porch, with a seat on either side of it, a gable roof, and picturesque chimney stacks. A bow-window or two, narrow and sharply-outlined, shaped like a letter V, projected into the velvety lawn from one side of the house. Upon the other side, under immensely wide, mullioned casement windows, were rows of straw beehives, all densely populated.

The rooms in the Trevor farm-house were long and low, with nooks and recesses in unexpected corners. They possessed immense old-fashioned fire-places, with fire-dogs of polished brass, high wooden mantelpieces, furniture of ancient date and by-gone fashion, yet well-preserved. It was a home of fifty years ago, with little of modern luxury and appliances, a home to which penetrated little of the bustle and turmoil of the great world, a home where one

might live indeed, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

Upon one side of the house—that which contained the drawing-room—was a wide green lawn, shaded by ancient trees.

Upon the opposite side of the hall was the dining-room, under whose windows were the beehives. Upon this side was an old-fashioned garden, full of sweet-williams, fragrant pinks, hollyhocks, sunflowers, tiger-lilies, with beds of heart's-ease, forget-me-nots and heliotrope, a bright and sunny garden where the bees hummed all day long and hosts of birds made music, as they flitted in and out of their lofty bird-houses.

Mr. Trevor was the representative of a fine old Welsh family that had dwelt in this old stone house upon the mountain-side for many generations. By nature he was a hearty, bluff, warm-hearted gentleman, given to hospitality, but for some months he had been a victim to chronic rheumatism and could barely move about the house on crutches.

His wife, a gentle old lady, with a soft, sweet, babyish face surrounded by gray hair, devoted herself to his care as if he had been an infant.

The remainder of the household was composed of several grandchildren with their mother and governess, the father—Mr. Trevor's son—who was a civil engineer, being absent in Russia, where he was employed at a lucrative salary in the practice of his profession. Such was the home to which the fugitive heiress, Beatrix Rohan, was flying for refuge from her pursuers.

Small chance of refuge from her enemies in a house whose master was ill, a house full of helpless women and children. Small chance of finding defenders in a house where the only defenders were servants.

It was late in the afternoon of the long midsummer

day—nearly dusk, in fact—when the rickety, rumbling old fly, with its rough Welsh ponies, which had conveyed Beatrix from Bala station, came down the rude mountain road, and turned into the long green lane that led to the farm-house.

It seemed to Beatrix, as she looked from the window of the vehicle, that no spot on earth could be more secluded than this. The mountains seemed a barrier between her and pursuit. The rugged scenery, the tall green hedges, the thrifty fields, seemed unlike anything she had ever before seen.

“It is like another world,” she thought. “No one would ever find me here. I could pass one year, ten years here, and not be discovered.”

The fly neared the farm-house, and presently turned in at the open gate, and rolled up the wide sweep, halting before the porch.

A troop of children and dogs came hurrying around the house, all alike stirred by the unwonted event of an arrival, the children mute enough, but the dogs yelping and barking in chorus.

The driver descended and plied the knocker. A heavy-looking woman-servant answered the summons, and Beatrix alighted and asked if Mr. Trevor were at home.

“Yes, he’s at home,” returned the woman, eyeing the young stranger, curiously. “Won’t you come in?”

Beatrix, uncertain of her reception, bade the driver wait, and followed the woman into the dwelling.

Crossing the hall, the servant ushered the young lady into the long, low drawing-room.

“Will you give Mr. Trevor this letter, please?” said Beatrix, presenting her letter of introduction. “It will explain my name and errand.”

The servant took the letter and departed.

Beatrice sat down and waited, her heart beating with quick muffled sound, her pulses throbbing, a keen anxiety possessing her.

And yet, despite her suspense, she noticed the five mullioned casement windows, all of them now ajar to admit the evening breeze ; the dwarfed book-cases filled with well-bound books ; the cottage piano ; the photographs, engravings, and silhouettes upon the walls ; the air of comfort and repose pervading the place.

Her suspense was becoming painful, when a little old lady—Mrs. Trevor herself—in a cap and white crape over a gray silk gown, came softly into her presence.

Beatrice arose, bowing her head deeply.

"You are Miss Rohan?" said the old lady, in a very small voice that was yet pleasant and silvery. "Yes? I am Mrs. Trevor. You are welcome to Trevor Farm, my dear. Dear me, how young you are! Too young to travel alone if you'll pardon me for saying so, although I know your necessity. Any friend of my sister-in-law, Mrs. Trevor, is welcome here. Let me take you out into our sitting-room. My husband will see you there."

Taking the girl's hand, Mrs. Trevor led her across the hall to the long dining-room, which served also as sitting-room.

Mr. Trevor was seated by the wide window, in a great straw-chair, his feet elevated upon another chair. He did not rise at the entrance of the young visitor, and Mrs. Trevor explained the cause, detailing his infirmity.

The girl's heart fell. This was no place for her, she thought. What was she to do?

Nevertheless, the bluff old gentleman and his little old wife exhibited such kindly sympathy for her and such interest in her that very soon she was sitting between



THE BELEAGUERED PAIR WERE STILL AS DEATH.—See Page 385.

them and telling them her story, omitting only to tell them of her engagement to marry Sir Lionel Charlton. That information she did not feel at liberty to impart until she should hear the result of Sir Lionel's mission to Lady Folliott.

Mr. and Mrs. Trevor had lived all their united lives at Trevor Farm, excepting one or two visits to London. They knew nothing about the impostures that are daily practiced upon benevolent people. They were kind-hearted, frank, and unsuspicious. The letter of their sister-in-law recommending Beatrix to their good offices in the warmest terms, was sure to fulfil its purpose. It scarcely needed the sight of the girl's sweet, pure face with its great, innocent eyes, and its look of utter weariness and sadness, to enlist their heart and soul in her cause. As it was, in less than ten minutes, Beatrix was made to feel that she had found warm and true friends.

"You've come to the right place, Miss Rohan, if you want protection," said the bluff old farmer. "You are welcome here as the sunlight. Isn't it so, Agnes?"

Mrs. Trevor gave quick assent.

"Is that flyman waiting outside yet?" asked the farmer. "Send him around to the stables, Agnes. He must stay till morning, if he will."

Mrs. Trevor rang, and gave the required order.

"And now I will take you upstairs," she said, addressing Beatrix. "You will just have time to wash off the dust before supper."

She conducted Beatrix again into the hall, and up a broad stair to an upper hall, off which several doors opened.

"The house is packed as full as a sardine-box," said Mrs. Trevor, with a little laugh. "We have not a single spare room, but I shall give you the chamber of

my oldest granddaughter, who can be put elsewhere to-night. To-morrow my daughter-in-law and her family start for Russia upon a visit to my son, and we shall have room enough then and to spare. You are come in good time, Miss Rohan, to prevent our feeling the absence of our young people too keenly."

She ushered Beatrice into a little box of a room, with a single casement-window, and left her to herself promising to send for her in the course of a few minutes.

By the time the young fugitive had washed and brushed herself, a servant appeared to conduct her again to the dining-room.

Here Beatrice found her host and hostess, their daughter-in-law, grand-children and their governess, and in the very first moment she was made to feel herself among friends.

Supper was served at a long table in the lower part of the room and consisted of tea, hot meats and vegetables, a savory pie, hot cakes, and fresh fruits. Beatrice was surprised at her own appetite. A load seemed lifted from her spirit. She found herself growing light-hearted and joyous, and before supper was over felt as if she had known the Trevor family for years.

Soon after the meal, evening prayers were read, and the children went away to bed. The governess soon after retired, and Beatrice, conceiving that the daughter-in-law would like to spend a last hour alone with her relatives, said good-night and departed to the chamber assigned her.

Kind hands had been at work to make the little room pleasanter for her. Fresh white covers had been put upon the dressing-table and bed. The bed-linen, fresh and pure, smelled of lavender. But, better than all the rest, a little portable writing-desk, open, and well-filled

with writing materials, was placed upon a small table, upon which were also two wax candles.

"How kind and thoughtful they are!" Beatrix said to herself, her eyes filling with tears. "What friends God has raised up for me every time, when I deemed that he had forsaken me!"

She sat down at the little open desk.

"Lionel has gone back to Durham and has discovered that I have fled," she thought. "He is very anxious, of course. I dare not telegraph to him. I dare not write to him at his own home. He will not return there at present. I must address him at Folliott Court. The letter will be forwarded to him wherever he may be. I must write to-night and post the letter to-morrow and let him know where to find me. And yet, somehow, I do not like to address him at Folliott Court. It almost seems to me as if in so doing I should betray myself to my enemies! Can it be that they have a spy in Lady Folliott's own house? Is there any one there who would give me up to my pursuers? Nonsense! What strange fancies are these? I will write to Lionel at once!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PEDDLER.

Beatrix wrote her letter to Sir Lionel Charlton, detailing the particulars of her escape from her pursuers, and telling him where she had found refuge. The letter finished and duly sealed, she undressed herself, said her prayers with a new and ardent gratitude to heaven for its goodness to her, and went to bed and to sleep.

She was awakened in the morning by the songs of birds, the hum of bees, and the glad voices of children. She arose and dressed herself, and, taking her letter, descended to the dining-room.

She found her host and hostess here alone, and after exchanging morning greetings with them and receiving a kiss from the little old lady, she solicited their advice in regard to posting her letter.

"If you fear that the post-mark would betray you to your enemies, or some spy of theirs, Miss Rohan," said Mr. Trevor, thoughtfully, "you might send your letter up to London by my daughter-in-law, who will post it there. She has to stop a day or two in London, and will find it just in her way to do you this slight service."

The junior Mrs. Trevor, entering at this juncture, confirmed her father-in-law's suggestion, proffered her assistance, and took possession of the letter.

Breakfast was served presently, and almost directly afterwards the roomy family-carriage was brought around, and a spring-cart for servants and luggage followed close in its rear.

The bustle of preparation succeeded. The travelers expected to be absent some months, and the leave-takings were tearful and protracted. But at length the younger Mrs. Trevor, her children and their governess, were safely bestowed in the carriage, which the old people and Beatrix watched out of sight.

The junior Mrs. Trevor's two servants, a woman who combined the duties of nurse and maid, and a man who was to serve as valet and protector, entered the cart, with the luggage, and followed after the carriage.

The fly, in which Beatrix had come to Trevor Farm, and which had remained over night, brought up the rear.

The quaint old farm-house seemed empty and lonely, even to Beatrix, when she re-entered it with her host and hostess. The wide casements were swinging wide open and the hum of the bees entered with the fragrance from the garden.

"It seems almost as if we had had a funeral," said Mrs. Trevor, sighing. "And they will all be away six months at the least. My son is very anxious to see his family. He has been parted from them for two years. You have come to us at the right time, Miss Rohan."

"You will keep me then?" said Beatrix, her sweet face flushing.

"Gladly," said the old lady, and her husband echoed her words with emphasis. "You shall have your home here for just so long as you will stay. This is not a home suitable for you, Miss Rohan, but it will prove a safe one."

"And a pleasant one also," said Beatrix, warmly. "I feel at home here already. Circumstances may render my stay here brief. Perhaps I shall leave you within a week; possibly I may desire to remain with you a year. I cannot be dependent upon you. I have plenty of money, and must pay my share of your household expenses."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Trevor demurred to this, but Beatrix was firm, and finally her new friends consented to accept remuneration for her board, the amount of which was fixed at two guineas a week.

This sum appeared munificent to Mrs. Trevor, who slipped out after a little and held a secret conference with her chief housemaid, a sort of general housekeeper, the result of which was that the junior Mrs. Trevor's room was put in hand to be made ready for the young guest's occupancy.

"I was telling Miss Rohan," said Mr. Trevor turning

to his wife, as she re-entered the dining-room, "that I wish she would give over her resolve to pay us for her board, at least for the present. We shall feel, if we take money from her, as if we ought to devote all our time and attention to her, which we would like to do in any case, but which just now is nearly impossible. You see, Miss Rohan," and he looked at Beatrix, "I am afflicted with chronic rheumatism ; and the doctor has advised me to try a change of climate for a fortnight. I am to try Swansea. The doctor thinks the sea air may benefit me. In fact our lodgings are engaged at Swansea, and we are to arrive there next week, on Tuesday. We had thought this trip to Swansea very timely, so soon after our young people's departure. As our rooms have been engaged for a month in advance, we must take possession of them. But," added the old gentleman, "why should you not go to Swansea with us, my dear ? You look pale. The sea-air would greatly benefit you."

"I should not feel safe there," said Beatrix. "I dare not face so many people. My only safety lies in perfect seclusion. I do not require care and attention. If you will kindly allow me to remain here during your absence, I shall be very grateful."

Her wishes prevailed. The Trevors consented to carry out their preconceived plans and go to Swansea at the appointed time, and Beatrix was to be left at Trevor Farm in the solitude she craved.

In the course of the day Beatrix was installed in her new quarters—two rooms over the drawing-room with wide casement windows and chintz-covered furniture—bright and sunny chambers with deep cushioned window-seats, and with a couch and easy-chair or two, which were very tempting to a weary frame.

And before night, the young girl had explored the

fragrant garden, and the farm-yard, had seen the horses and cows, poultry and sheep, had taken a walk up the mountain-side and had discovered two or three picturesque nooks for day-dreams, and several subjects for sketches.

Before the day appointed for the departure of her host and hostess, Beatrix was quite at home at Trevor Farm. She spent much of her time out of doors. Her elastic temperament rebounded in this atmosphere of freedom and safety, and she was happy, contented, and full of strange and sweet expectancy.

On Monday Mr. and Mrs. Trevor set out upon their journey to Swansea, after enjoining their stout Welsh housekeeper to watch over Beatrix with a constant care and to minister to her comfort in all things.

"We can trust Esther," Mrs. Trevor said, as she looked back from the carriage upon the group in the shadow of the farm-house porch. "She has taken a great liking to Miss Rohan. She will guard her at any cost if the need arises. I feel quite safe about our young guest."

Beatrix watched the carriage until it had disappeared behind the trees lining the mountain-road, and then took up her sketch-book and went out for a stroll.

She had reason to expect her lover now any day, but, strangely enough, he did not come.

Tuesday and Wednesday passed, and Thursday morning came, but still Sir Lionel Charlton had not made his appearance.

On the morning we have mentioned, Beatrix came down to breakfast at eight o'clock, dressed in the black silk walking dress in which she had quitted Bruce cottage, and which was now her only gown. Her hostess had given her a small supply of under and outer linen, and the frills at her throat and wrists were daintily

fresh. Her tawny hair was dressed high upon her head, and was crèpe in fashionable style. With her high-bred, patrician beauty, her gentle manners, her low, sweet voice, her wondrous dusky eyes, she made an exquisitely lovely picture, which even Esther, the housekeeper, gazed upon with admiring eyes.

A little round table had been drawn up close to one of the open windows, and a cover was laid upon it for Beatrix. Esther returned the young lady's salutation in kind, and disappeared into the kitchen, soon returning with the breakfast-tray.

A little pot of coffee, a plate of toasted muffins, hot rolls, a tiny silver jug of cream, a pat of golden butter, a honeycomb, and a dish of broiled ham and poached eggs, constituted the breakfast placed before Beatrix, but Esther apologized for it, as if it had been the first step toward starvation.

"You see, Miss Rohan," she explained, her honest face clouded, "it's this Eistedfodd over at Bala. And the servants have all had promise of a holiday at the time of the Eistedfodd: and they went at daybreak in the cart, and won't be back till night. Bad enough they wanted to stay until morning, for there's fine doings this evening, but I wouldn't hear to it. So you and I are alone in the house, Miss, and I am cook and housemaid and all for to-day."

"The Eistedfodd is a sort of protracted musical concert, is it not?" inquired Beatrix.

"Yes, Miss. It lasts three days. This is the last day. And they have music, both playing and singing, and choruses from different societies, and harp-music, and samples of the old Welsh minstrelsy. Oh, it's all very fine, and I always like to go myself, but one or two of those strapping girls should have stayed at home. The men are all gone too, except Jones, and he is going this

evening after feeding and housing the stock, and he'll stay at Bala till morning."

The prospect of a day of complete quiet struck Beatrix more pleasantly than it did Esther. The young lady ate her breakfast, went out for a walk, and finally returned and took possession of a seat in the garden, in the shade of a wide-branched apple-tree. She had several rough sketches which required touching up, and she set to work upon them, keeping a look-out upon the green lane which led to the house from the highway.

She more than half expected her lover upon this morning. It was more than a week since she had written to him. There had been ample time for her letter to be forwarded to him from Folliott Court, were he anywhere in England. She had resolved to remain in the house or very near it, throughout the day.

"Something is going to happen. I feel it," she said to herself. "This day will not be eventless, like yesterday. Oh, if Lionel should come! If Lady Folliott should have given her consent to our marriage!"

Her cheeks flushed softly, and she bent more closely over her task.

About one o'clock, Esther brought out Miss Rohan's dinner, and spread it upon a little table under the apple-tree.

After the meal, Beatrix resumed her drawing,

Esther finished her household work, and stood in the kitchen doorway, her eyes fixed upon the tawny little head gleaming amid the garden shrubbery, with an expression of actual affection. Few people could live in the same house with Beatrix a week without learning to love her, and the fascination of her perfect courtesy, her gentleness and sweetness, had won Esther's heart.

The woman was tall, large and brawny, with a heavy face, and with dull sluggish eyes, a stolid, faithful crea-

ture, with a true and honest nature. Beatrix had liked her from the first. She was about to call to her now to come and share her retreat in the garden, when Esther, bethinking herself of the dogs, whom she had promised to feed, departed with a tray of meat in the direction of the kennels.

The woman was returning with her empty tray towards the kitchen when she beheld a man with a pack on his back coming down the lane and approaching the farm-house.

Beatrix saw him also and shrank nearer to the trunk of the apple-tree, around which the bench on which she sat formed a circle. With her black dress, she was likely to escape the casual observation of a stranger.

It so happened that peddlers were always welcome to Trevor Farm. The women servants were glad of the chance to buy needles and threads and tapes, to say nothing of a gay ribbon, a veil, or a handkerchief of a wandering merchant at their door. Bala was twelve miles distant, and some trifle was always wanting among so many. And more than one gown and set of Brummagem jewelry had enterprising peddlers persuaded the Trevor Farm housemaids to buy of them. Even Mrs. Trevor had availed herself of their stock in trade more than once.

Esther hurried to put her tray into the scrullery and to find her purse. By the time these preparations were made the peddler had turned into the Trevor grounds, following a path that skirted the flower-garden, and was approaching the kitchen door.

Esther came out upon the steps and sat down.

The peddler sent a swift glance about the dwelling and took off his hat, wiping the perspiration from his brows.

It seemed as if he were unused to carrying a pack

and tramping rude mountain-roads. Esther saw, at the first look, that he was a stranger, that he was not one of those peddlers who came to Trevor Farm regularly with the changing seasons.

He was tall and bent, and carried a staff. He had long gray hair, and a long gray beard completely concealed his mouth. His clothing was worn and shabby, and hung loosely upon him. He had heavy gray eyebrows, and from beneath them peered forth a pair of small gleaming eyes, like serpent's eyes, full of evil purpose, keen and watchful—eyes which, if Beatrix had seen them, would have sent her forth again a fugitive !

He proceeded to undo the straps which confined his pack to his shoulders.

“Do you want anything to-day, lady ?” he said, glibly, in quite a professional way. “I have walked from Bala since the dawn. Will you allow me to sit on your steps ?”

“Certainly,” said Esther, flattered at being addressed as “lady.” “Why do you leave Bala before the Eistedfodd is over ?”

“Because I've done a good business there already, and my partner remains there until to-morrow,” was the answer. “My route lies in this direction. Will you have something ? I sell as cheap as anyone on the road—cheaper, in fact. I'm a regular Cheap John, and anything you may want I've got. Toilet articles, from hair brushes down to hair-pins ; ribbon from a penny a yard, up ; lace at the same prices ; Hamburg edgings, Berlin wools, canvas patterns, trimmings ; pins needles, hooks and eyes, rufflings and buttons ; pocket knives and razors ; toilet soaps and perfumes ; gloves and handkerchiefs ; collars and neckties : everything in fact, that any one can wish for.”

While enumerating the articles composing his stock,

he had dropped the pack upon the porch, and unlocked it. Esther engaged in an examination of his goods with all the interest of a country-woman who seldom visits a shop. She wanted gloves, a collar, and some hair-pins ; and now began a lengthened trade, the peddler naming his prices, which were certainly very low, and Esther stating how much she would give. The two haggled over the discrepancy for several minutes, the peddler finally yielding, and selling his wares below their actual cost.

"Isn't there something more lady?" asked the peddler. "Here's something you ought to have," and he displayed a red scarf. "Only five-and-six, and it cost me five shillings, on my honor."

"I'll give you four for it," said Esther.

"And I'm to lose a shilling? No, lady ; but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give it to you for four shillings, if you'll throw me in a little lunch. I'm terrible hungry."

Esther assented, going into the kitchen. The peddler sat down on the steps and looked furtively around him.

"This must be the place," he said to himself. "This must be Trevor Farm !"

Esther returned with a loaf of bread, a bowl of milk, and a portion of cold meat pie. The peddler took them from her hands, declining her offer of water and a towel, and ate them slowly, keeping up a conversation the while.

"This is a fine old place, lady," he said. "May I ask if this is Trevor Farm?"

"Yes, it's Trevor Farm," assented Esther.

"Is the Squire at home? I have as fine a razor here as can be found in all Britain."

"The master is gone to Swansea for his health," said unsuspecting Esther, frankly. "The mistress went with

him. I'm only a sort of housekeeper. I was left in charge during the absence of the master and mistress."

A quick, odd gleam was emitted from the peddler's serpent-like eyes.

"Gone away?" he muttered. "Then I can't hope to sell them anything. But how about the servants? Won't the cook and the housemaid, or the dairymaids have a look at my goods?"

"They are all gone to Bala to the Eistedfodd," said Esther. "We are all alone in the house, me and my young lady. Only Jones is about somewhere, but he won't buy anything."

The peddler bent low over his plate.

"Then Jones don't see the Eistedfodd?" he asked. "That's a pity. There's to be a grand concert this evening."

"Jones is going to it," declared Esther. "Catch one of those servants staying away, if he could possibly go. But the other servants will be back soon after nightfall, else we should be alone in the house to-night, me and our young lady. They are to start for home when Jones arrives at Bala, and not before, so I shall start him off early."

"And why won't they start for home till Jones appears at Bala?" asked the peddler, curiously.

"Because they would like to stay the night at Bala, and because they promised a sixpence each, three shillings in all, to Jones, if he'd stay and protect the house and leave them holiday till morning," explained Esther. "Jones half-consented, and it was agreed that, that if he didn't arrive at Bala by seven o'clock, they would conclude that he had accepted the three shillings and stayed at home. But, if he does appear there, some or all of the older servants will come home immediately."

"A very nice plan," said the peddler. "But Jones

ought to go. The concert will be too fine to miss. Every Welshman with a soul in him, no matter what his station or education, should attend the Eistedfodd. You spoke of your young lady. Will Miss Trevor want anything in my line?"

"My young lady is not Miss Trevor, and I won't call her," said Esther, with sudden reserve, having an inkling of Beatrice's history. "She won't want anything, I know."

The peddler did not follow up the subject of the young lady. Finishing his luncheon, he repacked his goods, and restored the pack to his back.

As he stood up, his wandering gaze rested for an instant upon the tawny head of Beatrice, who sat in the garden, her back toward him.

A quick and savage gleam shone in his serpent eyes, which had grown cool again, but he did not otherwise betray emotion at sight of her.

Bidding Esther good-day, he turned to go. Pausing as in indecision on the walk, he beheld Jones through the open gate of the stable-yard, and turned his steps in that direction. He passed the dog-kennels on his way, and halted and stared at the powerful brutes for a full moment in a reflective sort of way, and then approached Jones, who was standing still, awaiting him.

He offered his wares for sale, much as he had done with Esther, but Jones did not become a purchaser. The peddler then spoke of the Eistedfodd, of the crowds in attendance, of the grand concert in prospect for that evening; and Jones listened eagerly, his look of indecision giving place to one of determination.

"I'm going over myself," he said. "I shall leave here at five o'clock, so as to be in time for the concert."

The peddler smiled under his gray beard as he quitted the yard and walked out into the lane again

moving towards the mountain road, but his smile was evil. His hanging underlip quivered strangely as he muttered :

“So far, good ! The girl is there ! The house must be left unprotected to-night. Jones must be disposed of. The dogs also. There will then be but the two women in the house. We shall manage it ! Beatrix little dreams what the next few hours have in store for her !”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VOE'S MANTLE FALLS UPON ANOTHER.

In her amazement at the announcement of the land-steward that a man had been found murdered in Folliott Park, Lady Foilliott did not even bestow one glance upon the false Miss Bermyngham.

Nor did the land-steward look toward her. He was full of his ghastly discovery, horrified and frightened, and greatly excited.

The impostor, in spite of her self-schooling, in spite of the fact that she had been expecting that very announcement from the very hour of her crime, had been none the less startled by it. The blood had seemed to surge backwards through her veins, damming up her heart. She felt stupefied, benumbed, paralyzed. Her black, staring eyes were fixed upon the steward with a look of dread terror.

“What is that you say, Lambton ?” cried the baroness, sharply. “A man found dead in the park ? Impossible !”

“He was discovered by the park-keepers not an hour

ago, my lady," said the land-steward, excitedly. "He was murdered—stabbed to the heart! He must have been dead a day or two!"

By this time the false Miss Bermyngham had recovered from the shock Mr. Lambton's first words had caused her and now sat down in a large, high-backed chair, keeping her face in the shadow.

"What curious story is this?" demanded Lady Folliott, by no means comprehending the truth as stated to her. "Who is the man? One of the park-keepers?"

"No, my lady, he's an ill-looking fellow, a stranger here. No one seems to know anything about him. Thomas, the under-keeper, came upon the body less than an hour ago. It is in a thicket on the south-east side, near the Cedar clump. Who the man is, how he came there, and who killed him, are all alike a mystery."

"Perhaps he committed suicide?" suggested the false Miss Bermyngham, in her usual voice.

"If he had committed suicide the knife would be there," declared Mr. Lambton. "I was in my own house at the other end of the park, at my luncheon, when one of the keepers came for me. By the time I arrived at the scene all the laborers on the estate within a radius of a half-mile were gathered there. I sent over to Folliott Fens to notify the coroner. The body lies as we found it, except that it lay on its face, and we turned it over to make sure that he was dead. There will be an inquest this afternoon, I suppose. It won't take long to impanel a jury and get at some of the facts in the case."

"But what a frightful occurrence!" said Lady Folliott, shuddering. "A man found dead in the park? Murdered? Mr. Lambton, you should have requested to see me alone. Miss Bermyngham should not have heard this ghastly story."

"I must have heard it from others in the course of a day or two, Aunt Folliott," said the impostor, composedly. "It has not injured me at all. My heart beats as calmly as ever. It isn't as if I had ever seen the man, you know, dear."

"No, of course not," assented Lady Folliott. "Mr. Lambton, I am all impatient to hear more about this affair. The murderer—if the man has really been murdered—must be discovered. Go back to the park, and return from time to time with news. Hasten to let me know the decision of the coroner's jury."

The land-steward bowed assent and hurried away as rapidly as he had come.

As he had said, the Folliott Fens coroner had been notified of the mysterious affair, and in the course of an hour was upon the scene attended by a crowd of villagers. A coroner's jury was hastily impaneled. The position of the dead body was minutely examined, the park was scoured in that vicinity for some further clue to the tragedy, and the ground was scrutinized for signs of a struggle.

The park-keepers who had discovered the body had completely obliterated such marks if there had originally been any. No suspicious footprints were discovered. The man lay there dead, but how he came to his death could be ascertained by no signs other than those found upon the body itself.

By order of the coroner, the body was picked up by two stalwart men and laid upon a hurdle. Four men undertook to transport this ghastly burden to the village, and, guarded by the coroner's jury and the park laborers, and followed by the curious crowd of villagers the body of Caspar Voe was slowly conveyed to the Marquis of Granby Inn, at which he had stopped, and

from which he had stolen forth secretly upon the night in which he had gone to his death.

Arrived at the inn, the body was placed upon a table in the parlor, and the inquest began, the villagers crowding around, full of awe at the mystery which was unparalled in all their experience.

The coroner was a small shopkeeper, of ordinary intelligence, and the proceedings were conducted by him with due regard to order.

In the first place, the landlord of the inn, recognizing the hideous, scarred face with its single eye, testified that the deceased had been a guest in his house only two days before, that he had registered his name as Caspar Voe, that he had arrived in the carrier's cart from Spalding, and that he seemed cheerful and well, that he had eaten heartily, and that he had retired early to bed on Thursday evening, saying that he was fatigued and must rest, as he should return to London on the following morning. He had requested to be called early, and had spoken for a place in the carrier's cart on its return to Spalding. But when the landlord knocked on his door early the next morning, there had been no response. The landlord, fearing that something was wrong, after repeated assaults upon the door, had finally effected a violent entrance into the room. And then he had discovered that the bed had not been slept in, that the window was open, and the guest was gone. He had not seen him from the hour in which he, Voe, had gone up to his room until now when the said Voe lay before him stark and stiff in death.

The hostler testified that on Wednesday morning, as he stood pumping water at the horse-trough, deceased, who had then newly-arrived at the inn, came out and made inquiry of him as to the distance to Folliott Court. The hostler had supposed from his dress and appearance

that he was some broken-down gentleman who had come to solicit pecuniary assistance from Lady Folliott. The hostler had called attention of deceased to the Folliott carriage over the way, and deceased had crossed the street and stared at Lady Folliott and her niece, Miss Bermyngham. Whether deceased had really applied to the ladies for help, the hostler did not know.

It had become necessary in the investigation of the affair, to learn if Voe had really presented himself at Folliott Court, and the land-steward was dispatched to make the necessary inquiries.

When Mr. Lambton returned to the inn, he was seated in the Folliott carriage with Lady Folliott, the false Miss Bermyngham, Finette the impostor's maid, and the hall-porter who had admitted Voe on the occasion of his open visit to the Court.

Place was made for the baroness and her party, and chairs were given them. Lady Folliott had chosen to come in person to the inn, and the impostor had insisted upon accompanying her. Calm and untroubled was the pretty pink-and-white face of the pretended India heiress ; she looked a little haughty, a little disdainful, somewhat wondering ; but there was nothing in her appearance to indicate that a guilty soul lay beneath that snowy robe—that an unquiet heart beat under those laces and embroideries.

The hall-porter testified that the deceased had come to Folliott Court and had demanded to see Miss Bermyngham ; that Miss Bermyngham's maid had come down to him and sent him away, and that he had not presented himself at Folliott Court thereafter.

Finette, the maid, testified to the same effect, that she had gone down to see the deceased ; that he had made inquiries concerning a former maid of Miss Bermyngham, who had died upon her arrival in London from

India, and that, on hearing of said maid's death, he had shown surprise and grief, appearing to be shocked, and had gone away in a sort of stupor.

Lady Folliott and the false Miss Bermyngham both testified that they had not seen the deceased and knew nothing concerning him.

They then departed as they had come.

The testimony that succeeded was that of the keepers who had found the body, and of the village physician who was called in to examine it.

But their testimony proved only that the man had been foully murdered. If the knife with which the deed had been committed had been left in the body, the case might possibly have been deemed one of suicide ; but under the circumstances, there could be but one verdict.

And that verdict was that the deceased had come to his death by knife-wounds inflicted by some person to the coroner's jury unknown.

An examination of the few effects—a worn bag, with a shirt or two in it—and of the pockets of the deceased threw no fresh light upon the subject. The man had died possessed of but a few shillings, not enough to pay his funeral expenses.

"He will have to be buried in a pauper's grave," said the doctor. "The matter must be attended to at once."

The afternoon had been consumed in investigations, and the night was now coming on. Just as the jury were about to disperse, the carrier's cart came rolling into the paved court-yard of the inn, and a single passenger alighted. The landlord, alive to his own interests, despite the tragedy absorbing his mind, hastened to meet him.

The new-comer was a short, stout man, with a smooth

and beardless face and a narrow forehead, a man with a dissipated appearance, whose new clothing, and the heavy gold watch-chain he displayed, could not make him look respectable.

"Are you the landlord?" asked this personage, addressing his host. "My name is Gordon Hyslop, sir. I wish to see my cousin who is stopping here—Mr. Caspar Voe."

The landlord's amazement betrayed itself in his countenance.

"Are you Mr. Voe's cousin?" he exclaimed. "And you have come to see him? How strange! How very strange!"

"I see nothing strange in it," said the new-comer, testily. "The strangeness is in your conduct. Be good enough to inform Mr. Voe immediately of my presence here—or, better still, take me to him!"

The landlord conducted Mr. Hyslop away from the gathering crowd into a little private room.

"My dear sir," he said, solemnly, "prepare yourself for bad news. Your cousin, Mr. Voe, is dead!"

"Dead! Impossible!"

"Murdered!" said the landlord, in a tragic whisper. "He was found this very day in Folliott Park, dead—murdered!"

"Murdered?"

"His body lies in the parlor. The coroner's jury has just fetched in a verdict of murdered by parties unknown," said the landlord.

Mr. Hyslop was naturally shocked. His face, ruddy by nature, was very pale. He seemed scarcely able to credit the landlord's words.

"Murdered!" he repeated. "Take me to him. There may be some mistake of identity. Take me to see him!"

The landlord complied. The room in which the inquest had been held was deserted now, and the dead body lay on the table, covered over with a sheet.

Gordon Hyslop turned down the covering from the face and looked upon it with emotion. There could be no mistake in Voe's identity. His disfigured countenance would have been recognized anywhere by one who had once seen it.

"Who could have killed him?" said Hyslop, hoarsely. "Tell me all about it, landlord."

The innkeeper rehearsed a large share of the testimony bit by bit. Hyslop added now and then a question, but for the most part was silent.

When the landlord had concluded, Hyslop said quietly:

"Be good enough to prepare a room for me. I shall stay a few days. I wish to see the undertaker presently. My cousin shall have a decent burial at my expense. And now leave me alone with him for a few moments."

The landlord went out. Hyslop looked down upon the ghastly dead face with tears in his eyes.

He knew the whole story of Caspar Voe's life, how he had sinned and been sinned against. He knew that he had come to England in search of the guilty woman, who, it was supposed, had assumed the name and disguise of Agatha Walden. Like Voe, before his appearance at Folliott Court, Hyslop had not heard of the death of "Agatha Walden." He knew that Voe had believed his guilty wife to be at Folliott Court still, as Miss Bermyngham's maid, and he also believed it. And therefore he leaped to a conclusion which, if he had known more of the case, would not have occurred to him. In his very ignorance he arrived at a conviction of the truth.

"This is more of that devil's work!" he muttered. "She killed his child. She disfigured and mutilated him, and tried to kill him. She is hidden at Folliott Park under her disguise. She saw Voe, lured him to a secret meeting on some pretence or other, and has killed him. He shall not die unavenged! I will devote myself from this moment to her destruction. Liliias Voe, the hour of your punishment draws near!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DRAWING IN THE NET.

At five o'clock of the long midsummer afternoon, Jones, the farm-servant who had been left in charge of the out-door affairs of Trevor Farm during the absence of his fellow-laborers at the Eistedfodd, had finished his tasks, and was ready for his pleasuring. He had put on his Sunday garments, and, precisely as the clock struck the hour, he drove out of the stable-yard in a two-wheeled cart, drawn by a rough little pony.

As he cast a glance toward the dwelling, Esther the housekeeper came running swiftly toward him, commanding him by a gesture to stop.

"I'm sorry you're going, Jones," she said, breathless and panting. "You'd better have taken the three shillings you were offered to stay at home."

"And is that all you're wanting to say to me?"

"No. I want you to send the other servants home the minute you arrive at Bala. It's lonely for the young lady and me in this empty house. Tell them they must be home by nine o'clock. Belike they'll try

to avoid seeing you and make pretence that they thought you had accepted their offer and were intending to remain here yourself over night."

"I'll be sharp enough for them, missus," responded Jones. "They'll be along here soon after nine o'clock. But if there should be any delay, you can let the dogs out, you know, and feel as safe as if a troop of soldiers were guarding the house. But if I am to get to Bala early, I must be off early."

He touched his pony lightly with the whip and drove away.

Esther slowly returned to the house.

Jones drove down the green lane and turned into the rugged mountain road. There were two roads leading to Bala, one being more direct than the other. But this direct road traversed certain rickety bridges, and there had been frequent storms of late, and the streams were swollen, and Jones fancied that he had heard that one of the bridges had been carried away by a freshet.

"That road is so little traveled, on account of its roughness, that I can't be sure about the bridges," he said to himself. "I might possibly have to go miles up or down the stream to find another bridge or a ford, and so find that the more haste the less speed, and the longest way round is the surest way home. No ; to be on the safe side I'll take the usual route."

He pursued his journey by the more frequented road, keeping his pony at a steady jog. If the more direct road were too rough and steep for heavy loads, the same might also be said of this route. But Jones was used to these hills and hollows, and did not even think of them, as he hurried on toward the scene of festivities.

At a distance of some four miles from Trevor Farm,

the road passed through a thickly-grown wood ; which even at mid-day, was dark and gloomy.

Jones was in the midst of this gloom when his horse halted abruptly. The man struck him and the animal reared and plunged, but resolutely refused to advance a single step.

Jones leaned forward and stared into the road. A tree that had been recently felled lay across its path, its branches reaching upward and outward in all directions.

"A narrow escape," the man muttered. "Strange I didn't see it ! What a singular accident ! What am I to do ? Can I move the tree ? I wish I had taken the other road after all !"

Grumbling at his luck, he descended from his vehicle and proceeded to investigate the obstacle.

As he tugged and pulled at the fallen tree with unavailing effort, two men, with black masks upon their faces, started up from the wayside shrubbery, and bounded towards him.

They held in their hands pistols which were pointed at the luckless pleasure-seeker in a manner that made his teeth chatter.

Poor Jones could scarcely believe his own eyesight. The adventure was precisely like many of which he had heard in his boyhood—adventures in which gentlemen had been stopped by highwaymen and offered an alternative between death and rendering up their purses.

But in these days of steam railways, and telegraphs, of policemen and increased civilization, there were no longer highwaymen. And if there were, Jones was only a poor farm servant, with never at the most, more than a few shillings in his pocket. He would have

tried to explain this, but the unprecedented character of the adventure held him dumb.

Contrary to his expectations, the two masked men did not demand his "money or life." But one came upon either side of him and seized his arms, and, still presenting those formidable pistols at him, marched him into the edge of the wood.

The fellow's knees trembled ; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He gasped for breath, but not did he find voice until the men produced ropes and began to tie him to a tree in the midst of a thicket, and then he managed to falter :

"Oh, gentlemen, this is some mistake. I am not the person you want. I am not a gentleman. I have got no money. I'm only a poor farm laborer. I've got five and sixpence ha'penny in my pocket. Take that and let me go. I am not the man you're looking for."

"Oh, you're not," said one of the masked men, in a scoffing voice. "And what might your name be?"

"It's Jones—Timothy Jones," cried the poor fellow, eagerly. "I work at Trevor Farm."

"Come, come, shut up, or it'll be the worse for you," said the masked man who had before spoken. "Keep quiet, or you'll see trouble!"

And, despite Jones' entreaties and expostulations, his prayers and tears, he was bound securely to the tree, hand and foot, and in a manner beyond his greatest possible efforts to undo.

And now the poor fellow bethought himself of a fresh argument by which to move the hearts of his strange assailants.

"Let me go," he said, pleadingly. "If I don't arrive at Bala, the farm-servants will remain there all night, thinking me at the farm. And the house will be

unguarded, and Esther and the young lady will die of fear, and I shall lose my situation, and—”

“Shut up!” said his enemy—the one who had hitherto addressed him. “If you cry out, or say another word, you’re a dead man!”

Jones became mute as if dead.

Nevertheless, the two men fitted a gag into his mouth to render his silence lasting and having looked again to his bonds, returned to the highroad.

Jones’ horse was still standing where he had been left. The men led him with the cart also into the wood and secured him to a tree in the vicinity of his late driver.

“A high-handed proceeding, this,” said one of the masked men to the other, as they returned to the road. “But we’ve done no harm to that coward, and, thanks to our masks and his terror, he could never identify us.”

“High-handed, sure enough,” replied the other; “but not much worse than things which college youths do now and then. We’ve done cleverly. The farmhouse will be unguarded for the night. Success depends upon ourselves.”

“We must go back to Bala for the close carriage we want. This tree in the road here will not prove so great an obstacle to us as to Jones. Take hold with me and we’ll make room for a carriage to pass at that other side. Our axes are under that tree yonder.”

A few minutes’ labor sufficed to clear the road sufficiently to admit the passage of a carriage.

“And now,” said the elder of the two men, judging his age by his movements, “we must return to Bala, dine, visit the Eistedfodd to ward off any suspicion that we are not regular visitors to the concerts, and about dusk we’ll return with a close carriage. We must be

wary, prudent, and not too hasty in our actions. We have taken the first step towards complete success."

They hurried down the road for a little distance to a spot where a dog-cart was awaiting them, removed their masks and climbed into the vehicle, setting out at a brisk pace towards Bala.

As the reader has suspected, the faces now revealed to the light by the withdrawal of the masks, were the faces of Colonel Brand and Randall Brand.

The success with which Beatrix had eluded them since her escape at the Chateau Valbeck, had at last driven them to desperation. They had arrived at such a pass that no slight obstacle would be permitted to stand in their way, as witness their attack upon poor Jones, and the disposition they had made of the unhappy fellow.

Their plans had been laid with the greatest care, but with a boldness that even surprised themselves. That night was to behold an attempt upon Beatrix's liberty such as they had never dared before, and would not now have dared but for the loneliness of Trevor Farm, and the fact that the farm-servants were, with a single exception, away from their posts.

The manner in which they had again discovered Beatrix's refuge will be doubtless understood, almost without explanation.

Sir Lionel Charlton had hastened back to Durham, and found that Beatrix had again fled. No one could give him any clue to her movements. His inquiries were everywhere fruitless. Under the new relations between Beatrix and himself, he knew that she would hasten to communicate with him ; and even thought it probable that she had gone to Folliott Court. He returned thither with all speed, but found that she was not there, and that no message had arrived from her.

A horrible fear that her enemies might have discovered and captured her prevented his remaining at Folliott Court a single hour. Bidding Lady Folliott, if any letter or message came for him, to open it at once and telegraph its purport to him, at Durham, he again departed.

The next day, arrived Beatrix's letter addressed to him, which the younger Mrs. Trevor had posted in London.

Lady Folliott opened the letter in the false Miss Bermyngham's presence, and read a portion of it aloud. Her ladyship hastened to telegraph Beatrix's address to her nephew ; but he, fancying that he had obtained a clue, had altered his course and gone up to London, to the house of his former tutor, to whom he deemed it more than possible Beatrix might now have gone.

Some days were lost by him in this manner, and then he returned to Durham, finding there Lady Folliott's telegram. He turned about at once for the southward.

Meanwhile the false Miss Bermyngham had been swift to do evil. She had posted letters to Colonel Brand, in the assumed character of illiterate "Ann Jones," addressing one missive to his lodgings in London and another to Durham, giving him Beatrix's new address.

And one of these letters had been swifter in the fulfilment of its mission than Lady Folliott's telegram to Sir Lionel. Mrs. Brand was still at Durham, but alone, and did not receive the letter addressed to her husband. Colonel Brand and his son had gone back to London to pursue their search in that direction, had promptly received the letter sent thither, and had acted upon the information it contained without an hour's delay.

While these disagreeable experiences were happen-

ing to poor Jones, and Beatrix's enemies were closing in their net around their unconscious prey, all was going on well at Trevor Farm.

Esther served a delicious little supper to the young lady, and afterward Beatrix walked in the garden until the night began to fall.

Then the housekeeper lighted the sitting-room lamp, and, leaving the windows still ajar, passed in and out, busied with her duties, yet mindful of the young girl's comfort, and ministering to it in an unobtrusive way.

Nine o'clock, and no sign of the returning servants. At half-past nine Esther began to grow anxious. At ten she became nervous and uneasy, and closed up the house for the night.

"Strange they don't come," she said, at last giving vent to her uneasiness in words, as she entered the sitting-room where Beatrix sat reading. "I'm afraid Miss, that those servants are playing a trick on me, and mean to stay at Bala till morning, notwithstanding their promise to return to-night."

"Perhaps something has happened to Jones," suggested Beatrix. "His horse might have run away."

Esther smiled, despite her increasing uneasiness.

"His horse was twenty years old, wouldn't take fright at an earthquake," she asserted. "Jones wouldn't dare take one of the master's best horses, and the others took the best working ones. Nothing has happened the horse but its those servants ! Belike they meant to stay away all night. They were precious eager to have Jones stay here in their place."

By half-past ten Esther had made up her mind that the servants would not return that night.

"I'll let out the dogs," she said. "They will protect us safely. We've no occasion to be anxious. Just slip the bolt after me, Miss. It's well to be cautious."

The night was coming on pitch-dark. Esther lighted a lantern and went out, Beatrix locking the door behind her. Scarcely a minute had passed when the sound of flying feet was heard without and Esther beat fiercely on the door, crying out:

“Let me in! Quick! let me in!”

Beatrix opened the door, and as quick as thought Esther rushed in, and barred and bolted it. Then the housekeeper flew to the windows and the other doors throughout the lower portion of the house and made sure that not one of them had been overlooked. Then she returned to Beatrix, who still stood in the kitchen, full of amazement, and whispered shrilly:

“There’s something up, Miss. Don’t cry out! Don’t make a noise!”

“What is it?”

“As I neared the kennels,” said Esther, looking about her with a peering, frightened glance, “I fancied I saw two men in the stable-yard. I called to them, but they didn’t answer.”

“It must be the servants who have returned—”

“If it were the servants, wouldn’t they answer? Would they skulk in the darkness and be frightened of me? I was startled, but I fancied that it might be Owen and Grant, and that they might be playing a trick on me. So I turned to the kennels and thrust my lantern in. Miss, them two hounds were dead!”

“What!” said Beatrix, taking a step backwards. “Dead!”

“Yes, Miss, and the froth on their mouths and their doubled-up shapes showed as they’d died of poison!”

Beatrix was startled by this announcement, and her thoughts flew to her enemies.

“What can it mean, Esther?” she asked.

“It means mischief!” said Esther, briefly. “The

men I saw mean harm to this house. The dogs are dead. The servants are away. There's a set of silver that has belonged to the Trevors for a hundred years, in the plate closet, and mistress' apostle spoons, and the baby's cosset cup, and the big tankard—all sterling, and some rogues, knowing that the house is unguarded except by me, have planned a robbery."

"Is that all, Esther? Do you think that's all?"

"Isn't that enough?" demanded the housekeeper. "A robbery, Miss! Think of that! And we may be murdered! If there were any near neighbors—but there are none. We can't abandon the house. We can't leave it even. No doubt the scoundrels are outside at this moment. We are like mice in a trap."

"The servants may return at any moment—"

"No such good luck!" said Esther, grimly. "We have got to depend upon ourselves. Now what are we to do?"

But Beatrice was too perplexed to offer advice, or take the direction of affairs just yet. She believed the prowlers to be her enemies.

"If they mean to attack the house, why did they kill the dogs, who were safe in their kennels?" she asked.

"That's where they showed their wisdom. Those hounds would have broken out and taken part in any affray at the first scream from us. The rogues would feel safer with the dogs dead. But I can't help but think they didn't mean us to know that the dogs were killed. They must have meant to take us by surprise. Perhaps they foresaw that I would go out to free the hounds, and they meant to be lurking just outside the door and slip in during my absence!"

This was precisely what the Brands had intended. Esther's discovery of the death of the hounds had come before they were quite prepared for it.

Beatrice fancied at this juncture that she heard stealthy steps outside. She held up her finger, enjoining silence upon Esther. A rustling was heard upon the other side of the door. Someone was evidently listening.

The beleaguered pair were still as death.

Then followed a brief silence.

And then, so suddenly as to startle the two pale women as if it had been the roar of a cannon, came a thundering knock upon the door!

CHAPTER XL.

CLOSING IN.

Lady Folliott had conceived a keen and remarkable interest in the affair of Caspar Voe.

This might have been because the man had been found murdered in her own park. It might have been because women are fascinated by mystery, and this mystery seemed impenetrable. It might have been because, in all her life, she had never come in the slightest possible contact with crime or criminals, that she had seen nothing whatever of the play of the worse passions of humanity; and this case, through its very strangeness, engaged her thoughts and attention.

Life was so monotonous at Folliott Court, with its breakfast, luncheon, and dinners, its walks and drives, its canvas embroidery, daily newspapers, and books, the usual daily conference with the housekeeper and land-steward, and with barely an event from one week's end to another; that the murder of this stranger became an absorbing topic of thought and conversation

with the baroness ; and the false Miss Bermyngham was doomed to hear endless speculations upon the subject, and to be called upon continually for her opinion in the case.

The land-steward had explained to Lady Folliott that she would not be called upon to appear at the inquest, but she had persisted in going despite his counsels. Her rank, she exclaimed, did not exempt her from the common duties of humanity. Her hall-porter and Miss Bermyngham's maid had been sent for. She deemed it her own duty to declare that this man had not come to her for aid and been turned away. And why should she hesitate to appear at the inquest ? The coroner, the jury, and the crowd of lookers-on, were all her tenants, people she had known always and who had always known her. She had addressed them more than once on festival occasions in her own grounds ; why hesitate to speak to them now in the inn, which was her own property ?

But, though she thus silenced her faithful land-steward, Lady Folliott was not prepared to take her supposed niece with her. The impostor, desirous of hearing Finette's testimony, pleaded and coaxed to be allowed to accompany her ladyship, and upon being refused in the tenderest manner had insisted upon going, employing a tone and manner so wilful and imperious as to completely silence the baroness.

And thus it had happened that both ladies made their appearance, as we have described, in the inquest-room.

Upon their return to the Court, they retired to their separate rooms to dress for dinner, meeting in the drawing-room at the usual hour.

Throughout that evening Lady Folliott was full of speculations in regard to Voe and his fate.

"You see, my dear," she said, "this thing comes very near to us. This man was killed in Folliott Park, my own home grounds. His murderer doubtless belongs in this neighborhood. The murderer may be a villager at the Fens. Think of it. A man, perhaps, that I have spoken to! Or he may be one of my own servants! Is not the idea terrible? Possibly a keeper, perhaps even a servant in this house! The person who stabbed that poor man may be some one who enters my presence every day, to whom I speak very often, in whom I place confidence! Why, the idea is frightful!"

The impostor shuddered. Why did the baroness persist in talking upon this subject? The guilty woman felt every word as a blow.

"The man was tall and well-formed," said Lady Folliott, presently. "He must have fought desperately. His murderer must have been a large, heavy man to have conquered and killed him. Nerea, I shall begin to suspect every keeper and servant about the estate, unless this mystery is cleared up. What was the cause of the murder? Robbery? The man was poor. His clothes showed that, and the footman took him for a genteel sort of beggar. Not robbery, then. Was he killed in a quarrel? What was the quarrel about? Who is there at the Fens or Court who carries daggers?"

The false Miss Bermyngham pushed her chair back into the shadow.

Before Lady Folliott could pursue her speculations farther, Mr. Lambton, the land-steward, came in. The baroness bade him be seated, and said:

"I was just giving Miss Bermyngham my views of this case, Lambton. I fancy that I should have made a good detective officer. I have decided to my satisfaction that the man was not murdered for plunder. He

was certainly poor, unless he was a miser. Do you think he could have been killed in a quarrel?"

"What was he doing in the park?" said Lambton. "What business had he there at night? For he must have got out of his room at the inn and come straight to the park. The keepers were gone at dusk. It seems to me pretty clear that the fellow had an appointment there."

"With whom?" asked the baroness, eagerly.

"That is the question. Now, I have a theory," said the land-steward, thoughtfully. "The man might have been a burglar, though he didn't act like one, and no burglar's tools have been discovered. He may have met some confederate in the park—have quarrelled with him, and got killed!"

"That is plausible!" said her ladyship. "Our honest yeomen don't carry knives like passionate Italians. Have they found the knife?"

"No. The murderer probably took it away with him."

"As a witness against him?" said the baroness shrewdly. "No; you're wrong there, my friend. He would not carry about with him the instrument of his crime. He would have flung it into some thicket, or into the lake. Let the park be searched to-morrow thoroughly."

The guilty woman, all pink-and-white innocence, as she seemed, shuddered a little, but she did not believe the dagger would be found. She had thrown it far out in the water. And if it were found, who should prove that it had been hers? Lady Folliott had seen it, and admired its jewel-crusted hilt, but even if Lady Folliott recognized it—should it be discovered—she would not dare betray her knowledge. Besides, the discovery of the knife in the lake would be no proof of its owner's

guilt. If it were found, and the ownership proved, she could pretend that it had been stolen from her.

All these thoughts passed swiftly through the mind of the pretended India heiress, as she sat, apparently calm and unmoved, and deeply speculative.

"I will see that your ladyship's orders are obeyed in the morning," said Lambton, "but I adhere to my opinion that the dagger is still in the possession of its owner. It would prove too tell-tale evidence if thrown away."

"Very well, then. It doesn't matter about the search, if nothing is to come of it," said Lady Folliott, accepting Lambton's theory as actual evidence. "You needn't give that order in the morning, Lambton. But there is one thing I am determined upon. My servants and tenants shall not lie under the cloud of suspicion, if I can help it. I desire you to issue handbills in the morning offering one hundred pounds reward for the apprehension of the murderer of Caspar Voe."

"I will attend to the handbills, my lady."

"As to the funeral expenses, Lambton, the man may have a family somewhere. He may have a wife, who will mourn his fate. See that he is decently buried at my expense."

"As to the burial, my lady" said the land-steward, "that's arranged. A cousin of this Caspar Voe arrived this evening in the carrier's cart. He expected to find Voe alive and well, and is greatly shocked at his fate. He has arranged for the funeral."

"A cousin of the murdered man here!" exclaimed the baroness. "Who and what is he?"

The impostor said nothing. Her face was calm and impassive still; her eyelids drooped over the hard, black eyes; but with those words of Mr. Lambton, a

gloom settled down upon her guilty soul—a gloom that was like the shadow of approaching doom.

“His name is Hyslop,” replied Lambton. “I have seen and conversed with him. He declares that Voe was the son of a gentleman, and that he has just arrived from India. He was in search of some one in this neighborhood.”

“The son of a gentleman!” echoed Lady Folliott. “He must have fallen very low.”

“He did. Hyslop told me the whole story. This Hyslop is evidently a dissipated fellow, but he is of a good family. His father was a physician of some local repute, and his mother has a small property in Lancashire. Hyslop returned with his cousin from India, the one in the second cabin, the other, Voe, before the mast. Hyslop showed considerable emotion in speaking of Voe. It seems that Voe’s father was a Lancashire curate, with a large family, that he had influential friends who assisted him to educate his children and procure appointments for them. This son, Caspar Voe, was sent out to India as some colonial magnate’s secretary. He did very well until he became enamored of a music-hall singer and second-rate actress, a beautiful, unscrupulous girl, whom he made his wife.”

Lady Folliott glanced toward her supposed niece.

“No, there is nothing in the story which Miss Bermyngham might not hear,” said the land-steward. “His marriage cost him his situation. He became a clerk in a drygoods shop. His wife turned out frivolous, faithless, and altogether bad. She made him jealous, and fretted and worried him until he took to drink and idleness. Still he loved her. A child was born to them. Finally, matters culminated. Of course, Voe had his faults. He was not good stuff to the backbone, or he would have set to work, let drink alone, and made

himself master of his own household. He went downhill rapidly. The culmination came in a quarrel between the pair, on his discovery of her utter worthlessness, and when he had become stupefied with drink she tried to kill him. She stabbed him with a knife and disfigured him, making him the frightful object he has been described to you. She succeeded in killing her child. The murderess fled, leaving him for dead, and it was in pursuit of her that he came to England."

"Why, this must be that case we read in the *India Mail* a long time ago, Nerea," cried Lady Folliott. "You remember how it interested us—the actress wife—and all? She was so young. Surely you remember?"

The false Miss Bermyngham bowed assent. She did not care to speak.

"How odd that the case which so interested me in the newspapers should come up again at my own door," said the baroness. "Did the poor creature—the wife—come to England, Lambton?"

"It is supposed so, my lady. Voe and his cousin believed that she had disguised herself and taken another name—that she had come to England as a lady's maid. He believed that she had assumed the name of Agatha Walden, and that she had come to England in the service of Miss Bermyngham."

The impostor affected a start. Lady Folliott expressed her astonishment.

"I cannot believe it," said the usurper. "Agatha Walden was a pale, quiet girl, one that would not harm a fly. She an actress! She a bone of contention to lovers! She a murderess! Incredible!"

"She died suddenly, did she not, Nerea?"

"Yes, Aunt Folliott, very suddenly. She brought me good references which satisfied me completely in regard

to her character, although I had not time to verify her recommendations. Whether she was this Voe woman in disguise, or an innocent girl, can never be known. She is dead and buried. Her history is dead with her."

"I will tell Hyslop that she is dead and how she died," said Mr. Lambton. "He will have it that she's alive and here at Folliott Court, and that it was her hand that stabbed Voe the other night!"

"But has no one told him that Agatha Walden is dead?" asked the false Miss Bermyngham, sharply.

"He talked only with the landlord and me. I told him that Finette, the maid, had testified that the Walden woman was dead, whereupon he asserted his belief that Finette was Liliias Voe herself again disguised!"

"Does he think that I would connive at the disguise of Agatha Walden as a French maid?" demanded the impostor, haughtily. "His idea implies that there is a conspiracy in which I have part, for Finette could not be my former maid and I not know it. Besides, have I not said that Agatha Walden is dead? I saw her die."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bermyngham," said the land-steward, humbly. "I but repeated his idea. He is at his wit's end to account for this most unaccountable murder, and he thought—"

"Never mind what he thought. What are such people's thoughts to me? His idea is grossly insulting to me. Under any and all circumstances, Aunt Folliott, I shall decline to see this man. I will not have him propounding his insulting queries to me."

The girl arose with the air of an outraged empress, and walked hurriedly towards the door.

"Is there anything else to be said?" she asked, pausing with her hand on the knob. "Has he said what he should do?"

"Yes, he has sworn to revenge the murder of his

cousin," said Mr. Lambton. "He means what he says. He hasn't much money, he says, but he has an invincible will. He says that he knows that Agatha Walden is alive, and he means to find her."

The impostor made a motion as if to speak, thought better of it, took a turn or two across the room, and again paused by the door.

"Tell this person," she said, "that, first of all, he should go back to London and find the registry of Agatha Walden's death and the record of her burial. The murderer of this Voe is no woman. A woman's hand could not kill a man so strong and large as this Voe. You, Mr. Lambton, are keener than they all. You have discovered the truth with your keen intuitions. Voe must have been killed by some comrade in crime. For my part," she added, wearily, "I'm sick of hearing of this thing. The excitement is enough to kill us all."

With her hand to her heart, a gesture meant to impress upon Lady Folliott her—the girl's—extreme fragility of constitution, and to remind her ladyship of the pretended heart-disease, the false Miss Bermingham quitted the room, closing the door behind her.

"I fear this excitement may harm the dear child," said Lady Folliott, anxiously. "I must really take her up to London immediately. I must go to her, Lambton."

The land-steward arose.

"There's but one thing more to say, my lady," he remarked. "The funeral is to be to-morrow. This man Hyslop has asked permission to visit Folliott Court the day after, without anyone being informed of his coming. He believes that he will find Agatha Walden—that is, Liliias Voe—among this household. He has expressed this opinion freely to the landlord.

Such things get repeated. Although it is almost impossible that the woman can be here, would it not be well to grant his request? A refusal might subject us to gossip and misrepresentation—”

“Yes, let him come. His visit shall be kept secret,” said Lady Folliott, moving towards the door. “Of course, the woman is not here. I am sure that she is dead. Nerea could not have been imposed upon. But no obstacle shall be placed in his way. No one shall say that I have not opened my doors freely to investigation. Let him come—and we will see what the day shall bring forth.”

CHAPTER XLI.

THE DAGGER IDENTIFIED.

The funeral of Caspar Voe was deferred some three or four days, for various reasons, and was then conducted with great solemnity, and was attended by all the villagers of Folliott Fens. Lady Folliott sent her carriage to join in the procession, and the ill-fated man, whose life had been such a wreck and failure, was buried in a remote corner of the village churchyard, no relative or friend other than Hyslop witnessing his burial.

After Gordon Hyslop had returned to the inn, upon the day of the funeral, Mr. Lambton called upon him, informing him that Lady Folliott had given her consent to his visit to Folliott Court upon the next day, and that opportunity would be given him to pass the entire household in review.

“My lady is very kind,” said Lambton, impressing

upon Hyslop the extreme condescension of the baroness in allowing his investigation. "This murder business had nearly made both the Court ladies ill. Miss Bermyngham has heart-disease and has been confined to her room for several days. My lady will take her up to town in a day or two for medical advice."

"I would like to see Miss Bermyngham, if only for a moment," said Hyslop. "I would like to ask her a few questions about that Agatha Walden. You see Mr. Lambton, Liliias Voe was a perfect serpent. She might have pretended to die, and have completely deceived Miss Bermyngham—"

"But in that case Liliias Voe wouldn't be at Folliot Court."

"No. The thing is all a puzzle to me. Only one thing I don't believe and that is that Liliias Voe is dead. And one thing that I do believe, and that is that Caspar Voe died by his wife's hand. The woman may have followed him from London—Miss Bermyngham may believe her dead—I can't form an idea of the truth but I mean to unravel it in the end. I think it possible that Liliias might have told her story in her own way—she's full of guile, and would deceive a detective even—to Miss Bermyngham, and that lady may have been taken in with her tears and pretences, and be assisting her to hide. There's my theory in a nutshell."

"I can't put faith in it."

"Well, I do. If I could see Miss Bermyngham, if I could ask her about her maid's death—"

"But you can't see her. She is not well, and the order is given that she is to hear no more of this affair."

"I dare say I shall do as well without seeing her. My mind is fixed upon that Finette. I expect to find in her the woman I seek. But how am I to see the entire household?"

"You are to go as the bearer of a letter to me," said the land-steward. "I will be at Folliott Court, and the servants will think that you failed to find me at my own house, and so followed me to the Court. You will insist on delivering the letter into my own hands. You will present yourself at the servants' door precisely at two o'clock, and make your way into the servants' hall, where at that hour the servants are at dinner. You must then use your eyes."

"The servants will be at their dinner in the servants' hall at two o'clock," repeated Hyslop, musingly. "I will be there."

"Lady Folliott's maid and Miss Bermyngham's maid dine at three o'clock with the housekeeper and butler, in the housekeeper's room," continued Lambton. "I have been obliged to make a confidant of the housekeeper, who will manage to have both the maids in her room when you call. After visiting the servants' hall you will be shown into the housekeeper's room, and I will come to you there. You see that we have yielded to your solicitations to see the Court servants. My hope and belief are that your examination of them will be vain! It was no woman's hand that killed Caspar Voe."

So the two men separated. Hyslop's conviction that it was Lillas Voe who had murdered his cousin remained unshaken in spite of the evidence of her death. But the belief which he had avowed to Mr. Lambton—that Lillas Voe had told her story to Miss Bermyngham and enlisted the sympathy and protection of the great heiress—grew with further thought and deliberation.

"She's a cunning devil, is Lillas," he thought. "She has deceived and hoodwinked this great heiress. If Miss Bermyngham knew the truth she'd throw Lillas over, and allow justice to take its course. I'll see Miss Bermyngham in spite of them all, if I have to follow her up

to London. I'll set the facts before her. She shall know who and what she is harboring. If she chooses then to protect and hide Liliás, she shall know that she is protecting a wilful murderess."

Hyslop spent the remainder of the day as he had already spent other days, in a visit to Folliott Park, and a close examination of the scene of the tragedy. But, as before, he found nothing that could throw light upon the mysterious murder. He wandered to the fountain at which Voe and his guilty wife had met, but there was nothing to show that the murdered man and his murderer had ever been upon the spot.

He returned to the inn, grim and quiet, and spent the night.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, he was again in Folliott Park, a new project in his mind. The keeper allowed him liberty to go whither he would, and assisted his researches.

"Has the lake been dragged?" he asked, halting upon the bank of the pretty ornamental sheet of water. "The murderer might have thrown the knife in here. It would be more natural than to take it away with him."

The keeper replied that the lake had not been dragged.

Hyslop was very thoughtful. If it had been Liliás Voe who had killed her husband, he said to himself, and if Liliás Voe were at Folliott Court, she would have rid herself, at all cost, of the tell-tale dagger with which she had destroyed her victim. No dagger had been found in the park, although every thicket had been searched thoroughly. The lake would seem to afford a secure hiding-place for it to all eternity. If, then, it were Liliás Voe who had killed her husband, he summed up, and Liliás Voe were at Folliott Court in some disguise, she had without doubt disposed of her dagger by throwing it into this very lake.

There was a gay little boat-house with row-boats. Hyslop signified his desire to row on the lake, and a keeper got out one of the boats, seized the oars, and carried him out upon the pellucid waters.

"Do you keep your boat-house locked?" asked Hyslop, reflectively.

The man replied in the affirmative.

"Was it locked upon the night of the murder?"

Another affirmative reply.

"Then," thought Hyslop, "if my theory is right, and Lilius Voe was the murderess, and she flung the dagger into the lake, she must have stood upon the bank to throw it. It cannot be very far out in the water. I may find it."

He imparted his idea to the keeper, who communicated it to the half-dozen men upon the banks, among whom was now Mr. Lambton. The land-steward made no objections to the proposed search but even joined in it. Two other row-boats, with the keepers and Mr. Lambton, shot out upon the waters, and engaged heart and soul in the investigation.

The lake covered an area of several acres. Its banks were gently sloping. At ten feet from the shore the water was not ten feet deep. The bottom was artificial, of white pebbles, which gleamed through the clear translucent water with singular distinctness. The lake was shallow, even at its center, and goldfish could be seen darting to and fro several feet below the surface.

The three boats moved slowly over the lake, keeping a few feet from the shore. The searchers peered into the pure depths with diving glances. Foot by foot, almost inch by inch, they scanned the pebbly bottom, and the morning wore on and noon was passed, and still they kept up their search.

"It is useless," said Lambton, finally. "There's no

dagger here, or, if there is it's in the middle of the lake. It's time to give over this foolish exploration, and I am going home to my luncheon."

The keepers took up their oars, when a strange and startling cry came from Hyslop.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, leaning over the boat, and pointing with his forefinger into the depths beneath him. "I see something shining. It's a knife!"

The boats huddled together over the spot.

One of the keepers sprang over the side of the boat and dived to the bottom. He came up dripping and blowing, and holding up in his hand a quaint, foreign-looking dagger, with a slender, pointed blade, a little upturned at the end, and with a hilt thickly encrusted with glittering gems.

He gave this into the hands of Hyslop, who, with Lambton, examined it closely.

"Those are real gems," said the land-steward. "This dagger is a costly toy, and must have belonged to a wealthy person."

"It is of India manufacture," said Hyslop. "It must have cost a pile of money. It's one of those costly things that rich people buy to put in their cabinets as curiosities. Such handles are not made for use. And yet it's a murderous-looking weapon."

Lambton and the others coincided with this opinion.

"Lilias Voe could never have paid for such a weapon as that," pursued Hyslop. "But I'll swear that it came from India. She came from India also. The coincidence is striking. She never had an admirer rich enough to give her such a present. There's a dull stain along the blade—a blood stain that water won't wash out. In my opinion, Mr. Lambton, this is the weapon that killed Caspar Voe."

"The body must be taken up," said the land-steward.

"The doctor can tell if this dagger produced the fatal wounds."

"I wonder where this came from," said Hyslop, thoughtfully. "It may have belonged to Lady Folliott. The woman may have stolen it from Folliott Court."

"Perhaps Miss Bermyngham owned it, suggested Lambton. Her father was a *virtuoso*, a great lover of curiosities, and his cabinets contained rare treasures. Such a weapon was never flung in here from any but bad motives. If it had been simply lost here, there would have been search made for it. Mr. Hyslop, I regard this as a strong clue to the mystery of this murder."

"Murder will out," said one of the keepers, sententially. "There's generally some little thing that betrays the murderer, sometimes a bit of paper used as the wadding of a gun, sometimes his own scary actions, sometimes a word or look. Now if the murderer had carried this dagger away—"

"Its presence in his possession would have betrayed him, said Mr. Lambton.

"Will you allow me to retain this weapon in my possession for a few hours?" inquired Hyslop, addressing the land-steward. "I desire to show it to the doctor, who must obtain an order for the disinterment of Voe's body. And I wish also to show it to Lady Folliott, who may possibly be able to identify it."

Lambton assented. Hyslop insisted that it should be carefully examined by his companions, in order that they might identify it when called upon, and he then took possession of it.

He returned to the inn for his mid-day dinner, visited the doctor, exhibited his trophy, and called upon the medical practitioner to procure the requisite order for the exhumation of the murdered man.

At half-past one o'clock, the weapon still in his possession, he went to Folliott Court. It was two when he presented himself at the door of the servants' hall and inquired for Mr. Lambton.

There were some five-and-twenty servants employed at Folliott Court. Some score of these were gathered in orderly manner about a long dining-table, the housemaids, cooks, upper gardeners, and boatmen at the upper end, as became their superior dignity, and the grooms and scullions at the lower end, "below the salt," as befitted their inferior estate.

The eyes of all these persons became fixed upon the intruder. Not at all embarrassed, Hyslop, passing by the men, scrutinized every woman in the company with a gaze that was actually piercing. One by one, he reviewed them all, from the fat cook to the lowest scullion, and as he expected, not one of them by the wildest stretch of imagination could be supposed to be Lilius Voe in disguise.

"Of course, I knew I should not find her among these," he thought. "Lambton told me that all the servants in the house, excepting Miss Bermyngham's maid, had been in the family a long time. Lilius would never fancy being a servant. She was too idle and luxurious in her tastes."

The housekeeper made her appearance as he came to this decision, and he addressed himself to her, inquiring for Mr. Lambton, declaring that he had a letter which he must place in that gentleman's own hands.

"Come to my room, then," said the housekeeper, politely, having learned her part. "Wilson, Mr. Lambton is upstairs in the morning-room. Inform him that a messenger is in my room, waiting to see him. Come this way, sir."

She conducted Hyslop to her room, a pleasant and

large apartment, furnished as a parlor, with doors opening from it into preserve-closets and other repositories for dainties under her especial charge.

A tea-kettle was humming over a spirit-lamp, and three cups were on the table.

"You find me about to take a cup of tea, sir," said the housekeeper. "I have asked in the lady's maids to share my tea with me, although we dine at three. Ah, here comes Lady Folliott's maid now."

The door had been opened, and a woman had looked in. This woman, an elderly French person, now came forward, with a bow to the stranger, and sat down at the table.

A single glance at her sufficed for Hyslop. This woman was just what she seemed. It scarcely needed his remembrance of Lambton's assurance that she had been with Lady Folliott for seventeen years.

Presently the door opened again and Finette came in.

Hyslop's heart beat more rapidly. For a moment his vision was indistinct, then he saw her plainly. He had expected to behold a small, slight figure with a dark skin, black hair, and black eyes—Lilias Voe, as he had known her. He beheld a tall, angular person with a sallow complexion, a thin face, high cheek bones, and small, furtive eyes; a person not at all attractive in her appearance, yet none the less totally unlike the woman he sought.

A sudden dejection came upon him. He was very moody and sullen in his looks when Mr. Lambton came in. The two went out into the hall together.

"Well?" said the land-steward, interrogatively.

"I was mistaken," said Hyslop. "This Finette is not Lilias Voe."

Mr. Lambton actually looked surprised. He had

aken more stock in Hyslop's theories than he had thought.

"Then you give over your search?" he asked. "You've seen all the servants in the house excepting a footman, perhaps, who is on duty."

"It seems as if I had been brought to a sudden stand-still," acknowledged Hyslop. "I believed the woman here. I find myself mistaken. She may have followed Voe from London. That it was she who committed the murder I still believe. No one else could have had any interest in Voe's death. But you forget that my work is not yet finished here. There's the dagger! Did you speak about it to Lady Folliott?"

"No; she is so anxious about her niece, who is still confined to her room. I have told her nothing—"

"Then I must speak to her."

Mr. Lambton made no objections. He knew the deep interest which Lady Folliott took in this case, and accordingly ushered Hyslop into the library and ordered the hall-porter to inform the baroness that he, Mr. Lambton, desired to see her.

Lady Folliott entered their presence almost immediately.

Lambton presented Hyslop.

"Have any new discoveries been made?" inquired her ladyship. "Has any clue been found to the mystery of this murder?"

"A most decided clue has been found, madam," said Hyslop, respectfully. "We have discovered a dagger which has been recently thrown into the lake. It has not had time to rust, and there are stains upon it as of blood. We believe this to be the weapon with which the murder was committed."

Lady Folliott's interest was increased to intensity.

"Has the dagger been identified?" she asked,

"No, madam," said Hyslop. "It is of a manufacture and costliness that would preclude the idea that it may have belonged to one of the villagers. It is my opinion that your niece, Miss Bermyngham, has been imposed upon by Liliás Voe, and that Liliás Voe is not dead. I believe that Miss Bermyngham may know that she lives and be secretly befriending her under a misapprehension of her real character. And I have also thought that the dagger may have been stolen from your house. It is of Indian manufacture, profusely ornamented with real jewels, and is a great curiosity."

"I have lost nothing of the kind," said Lady Folliott. "Indeed, I never owned any such article—"

"Then you cannot throw any light upon its ownership," said Hyslop, his countenance falling. "There would be no use in your looking at it, madam, I suppose. It is so remarkable in appearance that if you had once seen it you would remember it."

He withdrew it from within his coat, unfolded the paper he had wrapped about it, and displayed it on his extended palm.

Lady Folliott bent forward, regarding it with a morbid curiosity, and then suddenly recoiled, exclaiming :

"I know that dagger ! How very singular ! Why, Mr. Lambton, that weapon belongs to my niece, Miss Bermyngham ! How could she have lost it ? Who could have stolen it from her ? I should have known it anywhere. It belonged to her father, and it is very valuable. Come with me. My niece will identify it. She is not so ill but that she will gladly add her testimony to mine and claim her property. Come with me, both of you."



CHAPTER XLII.

BESIEGED.

Beatrix and the housekeeper stood like statues, scarcely breathing, while that loud, imperious knock resounded through Trevor farm-house. They waited until the knock was repeated, and then Beatrix signed to Esther to speak.

"Who is there?" demanded the housekeeper, in a loud and firm voice.

There was a brief pause. It had occurred to the Brands—father and son—lurking like wolves outside the heavy kitchen-door, to endeavor to pass themselves off for the absent servants, but clearly that would not answer.

The women in the house were fully upon their guard. Esther's discovery of the dog's death had made an apparently straightforward course imperative.

"Open, in the name of the law," said Colonel Brand, in a harsh and commanding voice. "Open, in the Queen's name."

"And what for?" called Esther, undismayed.

"I have here a warrant for the arrest of Beatrix Rohan, niece of Colonel Brand, a young lady of unsound mind, who has escaped and fled from her natural and legal guardians," said Colonel Brand, as if reading

from a legal document. "I demand the surrender of the said Beatrice Rohan in the name of her Majesty the queen."

Beatrice clasped her hands and looked at Esther in silent entreaty. The housekeeper stood firm, but she certainly looked troubled and perplexed.

"Is Mr. Trevor at home?" questioned Colonel Brand.

"No; you know he is not," cried Esther, with energy. "You know, as well as we, that we are two women alone in the house, that the master and mistress are gone, that the servants are absent at Bala. You know, too, that you have killed our dogs—"

"Woman!" interrupted Colonel Brand, in a shocked voice. "Do you dare attribute such an act to us? We have but just drove up. We did think we saw two men near your stable, but came on directly to the house without accosting them. I am a gentleman. Beware what charges you make in speaking of me, or I may force you to the task of proving them in a court of law. Is Miss Rohan in there with you?"

"You know she is!"

"Beatrice," said Colonel Brand, in a coaxing voice, "I promise you complete forgiveness and immunity from any consequences of your wilfulness, if you will open the door to us. Beatrice, my beloved niece, for your own sake, I implore you to yield yourself to the dear friends who love you still—to the guardian whom your father appointed to watch over you!"

Beatrice's lips curled in haughty scorn.

Turning to Esther, she whispered:

"You will not give me up, will you? In heaven's name, Esther, stand by me!"

"I will!" said the woman, grimly. "Have no fears. The master's guest shall not be taken out of this house by men who would poison hounds."

Beatrice thanked her with a look.

"Still willful, Beatrice?" exclaimed Colonel Brand. "Woman! You housekeeper, are you going to open the door to us?"

"No, sir, I am not."

"Do you know what the consequences of this refusal will be? Your servants will not return from Bala to-night. Jones has been stopped on the way, and will not return either. You are helpless, with only this door between you and us. How long will it take us to break the door in?"

"A good long while, you'll find," returned Esther. "That door is solid oak, three inches thick. And it's barred across on the inside. It will stand a long assault."

"You were left in charge of your master's property. What will your master say when he learns of the damage of his house, resulting from your contumacious resistance to a legal warrant—"

"He won't think of me," said Esther, "nor of the house either; he'll be so mad about his hounds! You may be sure he'll get his pay for the dogs—and out of you too, sir."

"You refuse to obey her majesty's warrant?"

"I do!"

"Very well, then!" said Colonel Brand. "Whatever happens, you have brought it on yourself!"

There was a brief parley outside, the sound of hurrying steps, and then a heavy log of wood, which had been procured from a pile near the kitchen, was hurled violently against the door. A vigorous assault followed, the log forming a battering-ram of formidable character.

"Their entrance is merely a matter of time, Esther. I cannot consent to become a source of expense and

annoyance to Mr. Trevor. I cannot give myself up to these men. Is there not some way in which I can escape? Can I not get out at some other door or window—”

“They are likely to have assistants who are guarding the house. No, Miss; the door is stronger than you think. We shall keep them at bay a good long time, and there’s the chance of the farm-servants coming home. The night is dark; you could hardly see your hand before your face. You would surely get lost upon the mountain. Pray be guided by me, Miss, and remain where you are!”

Beatrix was guided by the old housekeeper and gave up her half-formed project of rushing out into the night.

“Oh, if only one of the men were here!” groaned Esther, as the heavy blows rained upon the door.

“Or if we but had the dogs! There are no fire-arms in the house, except the fowling-piece of the master, and that is out of order. We cannot fight—”

“Could we not pile some further barrier against the door? There’s your heavy dresser. Do you think we could move that?”

“We can attempt it. We shall be trying to do something, at any rate.”

They worked hard, and succeeded in barricading the entrance with the ponderous oaken dresser. The noise they unavoidably made reached the ears of the assailants in some pause of their nefarious work. They evidently comprehended what the beleaguered women were doing, and stopped to consult.

“What will they do now?” queried Esther.

The two women heard their besiegers try the massive window shutters softly, then the other doors.

"The front door is heavier than this," said the housekeeper. "I wish they'd try that."

But the assailants preferred to return to the kitchen-entrance, believing that their stout blows had made some impression upon its hinges. They renewed the assault with such vigor that presently the two women heard the door creak and groan, as if steadily weakening.

"We cannot hold out much longer," said Beatrix. "Oh, if the servants would only come!"

"These men will be in here within fifteen minutes," said Esther. "We might retreat from room to room as they advance, but these inner doors would be no defence. I tell you, Miss, what you must do. As the door begins to fall in, you can escape by one of the parlor windows, and hide in the shrubbery till morning. The night is warm, and the darkness will protect you."

Beatrix nodded in silence.

The blows of the log upon the door became deafening. The women huddled together, still as death. But the old door did not yield. The fifteen minutes allotted by Esther, passed, and still they seemed no nearer capture.

"We shall hold out, after all," said the housekeeper. "We shall surely—"

There was a terrific crash. The clamps in which the wooden bar rested were torn violently from one side of the door. The hinges gave way, and the door fell in at one side, banging heavily against the dresser. An exultant cry came from the besiegers.

They applied their battering-ram to the dresser.

"Now!" said Esther.

The two slipped into the dining-room, locking the door behind them. As they fled to the parlor, they heard the dresser go toppling and crashing to the floor.

Esther unfastened one of the parlor windows. Just then they heard the dining-room door give way, and the tramp of approaching feet.

Beatrice, without a word, sprang out into the darkness.

At the same moment the parlor door was burst in, and Colonel Brand and his son came flying in.

A cry of rage escaped them at sight of the open window.

Randall Brand bounded across the room, swept Esther aside as if she had been a child, and leaped out in pursuit of Beatrice.

It needed not words to tell him that she had again escaped him. An awful fury filled his being. A murderous hatred of her possessed him. He flew onward into the shrubbery, like an incarnate tornado. It was pitchy dark—he could see nothing; but he became conscious that some one was flying before him.

He shot forward like a bullet from a gun. His star was in the ascendant that night. For suddenly he heard the fugitive stumble and fall. In another instant, guided by the sound, he had hurled himself upon her prostrate figure, and had staggered to his feet with her in his arms.

His wild yell brought his father from the house with a lighted lamp.

"I've got her!" shouted Randall Brand, nearly beside himself with joy. "Your light here, on her face. Is it Beatrice?"

Colonel Brand came nearer, and let the light fall full upon the face of the struggling girl. It was Beatrice, sure enough. They had her safe at last.

"Quick! to the carriage!" said Randall Brand, his face glowing luridly in the lamplight. "We must lose no time here. We've done prison work to-night. We must be out of England by morning."

Colonel Brand, carrying the lighted lamp, ran on in advance, crossing lawn and garden, to the green lane, in which a close carriage drawn by two horses waited. Beatrix was thrust into the vehicle.

"Quick, father, get her hat and cloak," said Randall Brand, hurriedly, "She will need them, and there'll be no stop for us till we reach the sea."

Colonel Brand sped into the house. He found Beatrix's wraps on the hall-rack, siezed them, and returned with all speed, pursued by Esther, who had armed herself with a kitchen-poker, and was wild enough to give both him and his son battle.

Meanwhile, Beatrix had made a frantic effort at escape, but Randall Brand had thrust her back into the dark vehicle, saying in a tone that made her flesh creep:

"Come, Beatrix, we've had enough of trouble from you. Don't tempt us to kill you outright. I swear to you that I would destroy you at a little provocation. Remember if you die we inherit your fortune, all the same as if you were my wife! Be warned!"

Beatrix sank back in a farther corner. Colonel Brand followed her into the carriage and shut the door. Randall Brand mounted the box, whipped up his horses, and drove rapidly toward the highway. The night had come for Beatrix at last! Her enemies had triumphed!



CHAPTER XLIII.

SAFE.

The Brands had procured their close carriage at Bala, Randall Brand being his own driver out and from Trevor Farm. The two men did not care to take into their confidence a stranger, especially as they foresaw that, in their attempts to gain possession of the person of the fugitive heiress, they would probably resort to certain acts—such as the poisoning of the hounds—which a coachman might not sanction. In short, their policy of secrecy and caution was carried out in this matter as in all others.

But, upon their return to Bala, they purposed putting in fresh horses and taking up a driver who knew the roads thoroughly, and push through at the highest rate of speed for a certain point upon the sea-coast, at which point they had telegraphed Mrs. Brand to meet them.

Their evil plans had been well and carefully laid. Before the farm-servants should return to Trevor Farm upon the following morning, the Brands expected to be beyond pursuit with their prisoner safely in their charge.

“But man proposes, God disposes.”

Upon so small a thing as the choosing of a road, the turning to the right or to the left, was to depend the success or defeat of the conspirators.

As we have said, there were two roads to Bala—a direct road, rough and little used, traversing rickety bridges, one of which had been completely carried away by a recent freshet, and the other the usual rugged highway upon which Jones the farm-laborer had come to grief.

Arrived at the fork of these two roads, Randall Brand halted to deliberate. The direct road would be three miles shorter, as he had been told at Bala, and time was everything to him.

"The road must be in its usual order, or the innkeeper would have told me," he thought. "But he said that it was little traveled, being difficult for horses drawing heavy loads. I shall meet no one upon this direct road, and upon the other I might meet some one. Yes, I'll take the direct road."

It was dark, but he could trace through the gloom the openings of the two roads. He turned to the right, and hurried onward without a shadow of hesitation.

Now it happened that Sir Lionel Charlton had arrived about nightfall of that very evening at Bala, just twenty-four hours later than the arrival of the Brands.

He had proceeded to an inn, procured supper, and set about engaging a horse and vehicle to convey him at once to Trevor Farm. Untimely as the hour of his visit might prove, he was full of uneasiness and anxiety about his young betrothed and was determined to see her that night.

"It will be difficult to procure a horse at this hour, sir," said the innkeeper, to whom he had addressed himself. "You want it, I suppose, after the concerts? The Eistedfodd is a great success, sir, this year. We have a great many strangers here, some even from London."

"Indeed," said Sir Lionel. "That must be quite a com-

pliment to your musicians. Are these strangers musicians also, or merely music-lovers?"

"Well, I can't rightly say, sir. They don't seem to show much interest in the concerts, I must confess. They are gone out in a close carriage now, sir. They are strangers here, and asked me a great many questions last night about the roads and the way to Trevor Farm—"

The young baronet started. A conviction of the identity of these two strangers who did not show interest in the concerts flashed upon his mind, and he said quickly :

"I must have the horse immediately. Procure one at any cost, with a spring vehicle of some description. I must set out for Trevor Farm at once."

Expense not being considered, the innkeeper succeeded in procuring a horse and spring-cart, with a driver who knew the roads, and in ten minutes thereafter Sir Lionel Charlton was on his way to Trevor Farm.

"Shall we take the direct road, sir?" asked the driver, as they quitted the town. "It's three miles shorter—"

"The direct road, of course. Drive as rapidly as possible, my good fellow. How dark the night is ! It will be a guinea in your pocket if we get there safely and in time."

The driver pushed onward with increased speed.

Sir Lionel had heard that the household at Trevor Farm was large, and that several servants were employed there. He had no fears that any violence would be perpetrated in taking Beatrix prisoner, but he knew that Colonel Brand was the girl's legal guardian, and that he had a warrant for Beatrix's arrest as a runaway ward, and a person of unsound mind "unfit to be at large." He thought it more than probable, there-

fore, that Mr. Trevor might deliver up the girl into her enemy's hands, in the belief that he was thereby obeying the law and doing right.

"My poor Beatrix!" thought the lover. "My poor darling! Perhaps at this moment the Brands are at Trevor Farm. Perhaps she has again escaped them. Oh, God defend and protect her!"

The direct road to Trevor Farm comprised a distance of some nine miles. About four of these were accomplished, when the horse suddenly went dead lame.

The driver alighted, and with his lantern examined the horse's foot.

"It's no use, sir," he said, "we can't go on except at a snail's pace. We'll have to turn back and procure another horse."

"Is there no farm-house near?"

"None nearer than Trevor Farm, sir."

Sir Lionel repressed a groan. He could not go on with a lame horse. In case of an encounter with the Brands, and a rescue of Beatrix from their hands, he would need a strong, sound animal.

"Is it a straight road to Trevor Farm?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, as straight as may be, sir."

"Then I'll get out and walk," said the young baronet. "Do you go back and obtain another horse, and follow me as fast as you can. Give me the lantern. You can get another."

Seizing the lantern, Sir Lionel descended to the ground and walked swiftly up the road.

The driver turned about and set out upon his way back to Bala.

About a mile farther on, the young baronet came to the swollen creek, which with its rushing, rapid current and wide extent, looked like a river.

And now he discovered that the bridge was gone.

"There must be a ford below, or another bridge," he said to himself, controlling his impatience. "I cannot swim across here with this current; I must seek the ford."

Some three miles farther down the creek, the course of which he followed, he discovered a shaky little bridge which he crossed. He then walked up the river bank to the point from which the bridge had been torn away, finding himself again in the direct road to Trevor Farm.

He had made a detour of six miles over a rugged, stony road and found himself back again only a few rods from where he had started, the swollen creek occupying those few rods.

"It has taken me a long time to do this distance," he said to himself, halting. "I must have walked seven miles. It must be nearly time for my driver to return. I wonder if he will see that this bridge is gone. I had better leave the lantern as a danger-signal."

He found a tree overhanging the bank, and climbed up its low branches, hanging his lantern upon a limb that extended toward the opposite bank.

As he returned to the ground, he heard a sound of wheels rapidly approaching.

His first thought was of his own wagon, but a moment's listening showed him that the approaching vehicle was upon the same side of the creek with himself.

"It is coming from the direction of Trevor Farm," he thought, with a start. "It may be the Brands."

He stood still and waited.

The carriage came near, not abating its speed. Evidently its driver was not aware that the bridge was gone.

"Halt!" cried Sir Lionel, waving his arms in the darkness. "The bridge has been carried away!"

The carriage stopped abruptly. Randall Brand—for this was the equipage of the Brands—took up a lighted lantern from beneath his box and waved it aloft.

A single glance assured him that the bridge was indeed gone. He flashed the rays of his lantern upon our hero. Sir Lionel's hat shaded his face, which the Brands would not have known in any case. Sir Lionel's gray tweed suit was sufficiently commonplace not to attract attention.

"So the bridge is gone!" said Randall Brand, muttering oaths frightful to hear. "Is there any other bridge, or a ford, near here?"

"Three miles below, sir," said Sir Lionel, promptly.

Randall Brand uttered new curses of terrible import.

The carriage-door opened and Colonel Brand put out his head.

"What's up?" he asked.

"The infernal bridge is gone," said the son. "The ford is three miles below. This person here has saved our lives. I say, you fellow, do you know the road?"

"Yes, Sir," said Sir Lionel, loudly.

A shriek came from within the carriage. Beatrix had been silent as death from the moment of her capture until now.

Colonel Brand slammed the door hastily shut, and no further sound came from Beatrix.

Sir Lionel's blood boiled. He comprehended the truth, that his young betrothed was within the carriage, and that her relatives were bearing her away. He felt an instinctive impulse to attack both the Brands, but prudence restrained him. While he was rapidly turning over in his mind a plan of procedure, Randall Brand again addressed him roughly:

"See here, you fellow, you know the road; suppose you climb up here and guide me as far as the road

opposite this point. I'll give you half-a-sovereign for your trouble."

"All right, sir," said the young baronet.

He climbed up to the box, seized the reins, turned the horses' heads down the stream, and drove at a good pace.

Randall Brand made haste to conceal his lantern under the box, being unwilling to expose his face to the gaze of even a casual countryman.

"I suppose you are on your way home on foot from the Eistedfodd," remarked Randall Brand, as they sped onwards. "A half-guinea will pay you for your extra six miles walk. Drive faster."

"I thought I heard a woman scream inside," observed Sir Lionel, roughening his voice and speaking with assumed carelessness.

"Probably. I have a lunatic with her keeper inside. She is my sister," said Randall Brand, unblushingly. "Just whip that nigh horse. He seems to lag."

Sir Lionel's brains were busy. How was he to rescue Beatrix from her enemies? He might go with them to Bala and there denounce them, but the law was on their side. Before he could do anything they would escape with their prisoner. They were both powerful men, both probably armed to the teeth. Stratagem would avail far better than force.

They arrived at the shaky bridge, which was barely wide enough for a wagon to cross. It had no parapet. The water under it roared and rushed like a fierce torrent.

"The water looks very deep," said Randall Brand, leaning over and endeavoring to peer down into the noisy flood.

As quick as thought, Sir Lionel placed both his hands upon his companion, and with a quick and powerful

thrust sent him headlong from the box into the creek.

The wild yell of Randall Brand was lost in the noise of the wheels, as Sir Lionel whipped the horses and sped onwards.

The carriage windows were closely shut. The occupants within had no suspicion of what was occurring outside.

For the next mile, the young baronet ran the horses at a terrible pace. The carriage rolled from side to side, like a ship at sea. Colonel Brand, in a deadly fright, let down one of the windows, and shouted to him to stop. But not until a full mile had been passed, and the horses began to pant and to slacken their speed instinctively, did the baronet loosen his hold upon the reins or put up his whip.

"Can't you stop them?" yelled Colonel Brand. "We shall all be killed. What is the matter? What made them run away?"

Sir Lionel brought the horses down to a halt.

"Could you step outside a moment?" he asked, in a shrill whisper.

"Why, yes. What do you want, Randall? Is the harness broken?"

Colonel Brand alighted, carefully closing the carriage door behind him, and approached the horses' heads.

"It's not Randall," said Sir Lionel, coolly. "It's the new driver. Randall toppled over into the river back there, just before the horses began to run."

"Randall! In the river! Merciful Heaven! We must turn about then. Quick, do you hear? Turn. Who are you?"

"Sir Lionel Charlton, at your service?" said our hero, with a laugh. "Stand aside, old man!"

He struck the horses a stinging blow apiece, and

they flew away like mad creatures. A bullet whistled past our hero—another—and another ; but in an instant more he was beyond the reach of these unpleasant missiles, flying onward as fast as his horses could carry him. He plied the whip liberally during the next mile, but the hard roads and the furious pace soon exhausted the animals. After another mile or so, the whip had no effect upon them, and they came to a walk.

Then Sir Lionel stopped them, descended from the box, and opened the carriage door.

“Beatrice !” he called softly. “Beatrice, darling !”

Beatrice was crouched in the farther corner. At the sound of his voice she sprang forward and fell into his arms.

There was but brief time for embrace or explanations.

“Come, darling,” he said. “The horses have given out. We must walk.”

He helped her to the ground, and they set out on foot in the direction of Bala.

“I recognized your voice when you spoke to Randall Brand, Lionel,” said Beatrice, clinging to his arm. “I shrieked that you might know that I was there. Oh, thank God that you came in time ! But is not that the sound of wheels ? What can it mean ? Some new danger—”

“I think my own cart is returning. Wait. It is close upon us.”

He called out loudly. The cart was close upon them—Sir Lionel’s own returning vehicle, with a strong and fresh horse. The lovers entered the cart, and went bowling over the road towards Bala.

“Do you suppose that Randall Brand drowned, Lionel ?” asked Beatrice, in a whisper.

"By no means. He will get the good ducking he deserves, but will swim ashore—of course, he knows how to swim?"

"Yes, but he is an indifferent swimmer. Lionel, I fear that this affair may get you into trouble. Colonel Brand is legally my guardian, you know, and they have got out some kind of warrant for my arrest. They will surely recapture me in the morning, and—"

"In the morning, Beatrix, they will no longer have power over you. To-night you are Colonel Brand's ward. In the morning—by daylight, I mean, for it is morning now—you will be my wife! Lady Folliott has given her consent to our marriage. I have a special license in my pocket. The clergyman at Bala has been notified, and will be up and waiting for us. After I heard from the innkeeper at Bala that two men whom I believed to be the Brands, were gone to Trevor Farm, I sent a note to the clergyman, informing him that we should probably be at his house about midnight. We shall find him up, although it must be nearly three in the morning now. The special license I procured at Doctor's Commons in London, and have had in my possession two or three days."

"But will not Colonel Brand arrest you for abducting a minor?" inquired Beatrix, anxiously.

"I'll take the risk of that. I don't believe that he will care to go into a court of law in face of what you and your friends can testify!"

Sir Lionel's coolness reassured Beatrix.

They drove direct to the clergyman's house, and found the rector up and waiting for them. The rector's family, amazed at the novelty of a wedding at that untimely hour, presented themselves in dishabille, and grouped around, ready to serve as witnesses.

In face of the special license and the statement Sir

Lionel Charlton made of the cause of the untimely marriage, the clergyman could make no objections to performing the ceremony.

Half-an-hour later, Sir Lionel Charlton and Beatrice Rohan were husband and wife.

Sir Lionel pressed upon the worthy rector a bank-note which comprehended one-fourth of the young baronet's yearly income, and the newly-married pair proceeded to the inn.

"We will be married again during canonical hours in church, and with due ceremony, if you wish, Beatrice," said Sir Lionel, tenderly. "This hasty ceremony gives me the right to protect you. We shall have no more trouble with the Brands."

The dawn was breaking. A train would leave for Chester a couple of hours later. Sir Lionel ordered breakfast to be served in his own private parlor. The time of waiting was spent in explanations and in lovers' converse.

"We shall get away before the Brands return," said Sir Lionel, as the cab drove up to convey them to the station. "We shall go direct to Folliott Court, my darling. I have written a note to be delivered to Colonel Brand when he arrives."

The happy pair embarked for Chester without seeing anything of Beatrice's enemies, and as they took their seats together in a first-class compartment without other occupants, and the train rolled out of the station, Sir Lionel drew the tawny head of his young bride to his breast and whispered :

"You are safe now, Beatrice—safe forever, my own wife !"

Half-an-hour after the departure of the new-married pair, Colonel Brand and his son, both bedraggled and forlorn, with haggard faces and furious eyes, drove up

to the inn, with a broken carriage and a pair of half-dead horses.

The innkeeper hastened to deliver to the Colonel the note which Sir Lionel had left for him. It contained only these words :

"COLONEL BRAND : Beatrix is now my wife. Proofs will be given you at the rectory. I am quite well aware that you would gladly prosecute me upon a charge of abducting a minor from her lawful guardian. Do so, if you wish, but you will find that in so doing you will but make your own ruin the more complete. You know whether your conscience is clear, whether you are able to stand up in a court of law and court investigation. Should you desire war, Lady Charlton and I may be found at Folliott Court. Should you desire peace, leave England !"

We need not attempt to depict the rage and consternation of the two conspirators.

They were in no condition for war. Their lawless attack upon poor Jones, their poisoning the hounds at Trevor Farm, and, more than all the rest, the fact that they were in the wrong and that any judge would decide against them in a suit-at-law, and that they were liable to prosecution for their treatment of Beatrix, decided them to accept the situation and beat a retreat.

Accordingly, they proceeded to the rendezvous at which Mrs. Brand awaited them, and the three made haste to leave England for the Continent.



CHAPTER XLIV.

THE NIGHT AND THE MORNING.

The false Miss Bermyngham was alone in her boudoir. Lady Folliott had gone down to the library, meeting there Mr. Lambton and Hyslop, as recorded. The impostor was troubled and gloomy. A premonition of coming doom darkened her guilty soul. She knew that the baroness had gone down to consult her land-steward upon the affair of the recent murder. She knew that Hyslop must have reviewed the household servants by this time, that he must have seen that Finette was not her whom he sought, and she ventured to hope and believe that Hyslop would now retire from the field discomfited, and return to Lancashire and his own people.

"Can Hyslop be below now with Lady Folliott and Lambton?" she asked herself. "Is he here to say that his suspicions were all folly, and that he relinquished further effort in the matter? The lake here has not been dragged. No clue will ever be found to the mystery. There is only one point to guard against. Hyslop must not see me. He always hated me. He has seen me made up for the stage many a time. I fancy that he would know me under all this paint and powder and hair-dye. I shall keep to my room until I hear that he has left Lincolnshire. And then I shall go to London

for a change, or to Brighton. This thing has been a serious shock to me."

She paced her floor, her slight figure trembling with a chill. That dread presentiment absorbed all her senses. Night seemed shutting down upon her soul. She tried to reassure herself—to laugh at her terrors—but she could not shake off this deadly oppression weighing more heavily upon her with every instant.

"If anything should happen," she mused, "I suppose I should be hanged. Caspar told me so. But they should never hang me, never! I ought to be prepared—no one knows what might happen—"

She took out her keys and going into her dressing-room, unlocked her trunk and the toilet-chest within it. From the latter receptacle she brought out a tiny vial in which was a single white and transparent globule. She put this vial in her pocket.

Then, re-locking her trunk, she sent a long and comprehensive glance about her dressing-room. Her dressing-case was open, its ivory and gold fittings all displayed. Her jewel-boxes were open also, and the glimmer of jewels caught her gaze. A pink silk dinner-dress trimmed with point-lace lay on a chair. Scent cases, with gold-stoppered bottles, littered the dressing-table. An india shawl was thrown carelessly upon a sofa. With all her cowardly soul, this guilty woman loved these things, and she muttered now with a strange smile:

"Come what may, I have lived like a princess. I have been petted and flattered and fawned upon; I have dressed in silks and jewels; had a maid to wait upon me, and have lavished money to my heart's content. If I had been born to all this, I should have been as good as other women. It's not all my fault. If Caspar had been sober and industrious, I might perhaps

have been a good wife. What a strange life mine has been !”

She sighed, and returned to her boudoir.

“Worst came to worst,” she said, walking her floor up and down wearily, “I can escape them all,” and she put her hand to her pocket. “But why do I talk this way? I think I never had the blues before. I never felt like this after my baby died, and the night after Caspar died I slept like a child. I am foolish. Everything is right. What could happen?”

She flung herself upon a pale blue silken couch, and half closed her eyes. Steps were heard in the hall. Lady Folliott came in gently, yet with traces of excitement on her face.

Her ladyship had brought Hyslop and Lambton to the door of the boudoir, and had bidden them wait there a moment while she prepared Miss Bermyngham to see them. The door was not quite closed. The two men without could hear, but could not see what transpired within.

“Nerea, darling,” said Lady Folliott, approaching the sofa, “do you feel better now, dear? Is the pain in your heart relieved?”

The impostor raised her eyelids a trifle.

“Yes, I feel better, Aunt Folliott,” she said, in a low voice. “But I am ill yet. Is there any news?”

“Do you feel able to hear anything more about the murder, Nerea, dearest?”

“Is there anything more to hear?” demanded the impostor. “Is the thing not ended yet? Of course, I want to hear it all, but all this wears upon me. Has that Hyslop been here yet?”

“Yes, dear—”

“Did he recognize Finette? Has he found anybody that he thinks to be this Lilius Voe?”

"No, dear—"

"Of course not!" scoffed the false Miss Bermingham. "Agatha Walden is dead—dead and buried. Tell this fellow to seek out the record of her death. Aunt Folliott, I am surprised that you should have allowed him to enter your house. But perhaps it is as well. He is satisfied now and is gone away, has he not?"

"Not yet, my dear. He is satisfied that the murderess is not in this house, but, my dear, be calm, he has made a most startling discovery—"

The impostor raised herself upon her elbow.

"A discovery!" she echoed, in a hollow whisper.

"Yes, dear. They found to-day in the lake a dagger. It had been newly flung there, and is not yet rusted. The body of Voe is to be exhumed, and the wounds compared with the dagger."

Despite her paint and enamel, the impostor's face became ghastly. Lady Folliott, not noticing the change in it, continued:

"Hyslop has charge of the dagger. It is so costly that it could not have belonged to one of the villagers, he thought, and he brought it to me to see if I had ever owned it. I recognized it in an instant. My dear, it is the very dagger with the jewelled hilt which you once showed me as having belonged to your father. I identified it as yours—"

The impostor shut her lips tight together to repress the shriek that arose to them.

"Mr. Hyslop begged to be allowed to see you," said Lady Folliott, in conclusion. "You must identify your property, Nerea, darling. How could it have been stolen from you? Did you lose it?"

"That maid of mine must have stolen it," muttered the impostor, sullenly and huskily.

"But, Nerea, she died before I saw you, and you showed me the dagger, dear, here at Folliott Court. Perhaps you had not even missed it? How could any one have stolen it? Who was the thief? You will have no objections, my darling, to tell Mr. Hyslop that this dagger was your own property—"

The guilty creature leaped to her feet.

"I won't tell him!" she cried, in a high, shrill voice, whose tones fairly appalled Gordon Hyslop, as they struck familiarly upon his memory. "I won't see him. I won't be questioned. I won't be dragged into this awful murder case. Send him away. Tell him I am ill. Make him leave Folliott Fens. I won't see any one—"

"Hush, Nerea, you will make yourself worse. He shall go!" cried the frightened baroness. "I will send him away directly."

The door swung open, and Gordon Hyslop walked into the room.

His face, white and stern, struck horror to the guilty woman's soul. Her hand flew to her pocket. Her black eyes, wide open, stared at Hyslop in despair.

"I thought I was right!" said Hyslop, quietly. "Lilias Voe lives, Lady Folliott. Who is this woman?"

"My niece, Miss Bermyngham. Mr. Lambton, I call upon you to remove this person who insults my niece—"

"Your niece?" and Hyslop laughed. "I have seen this pretty blonde before. Wash the paint from her face and the dye from her hair, and you'll find a swarthy skin and black locks. She has a black heart, too, under that white gown. If I hadn't heard her voice, I should never have looked for Lilias Voe under that blonde mask!"

The guilty woman stood terror-stricken, her eyes not swerving from his face.

Again Lady Folliott appealed to Lambton to thrust

Hyslop from her presence, but Lambton stood as if stupefied.

"You are found out, Liliias Voe!" said Hyslop, with a touch of triumph. "You murdered your baby. You murdered your husband. Without doubt you murdered the real Miss Bermyngham. I expected to find the murderess in Finette, and I brought an officer to arrest her. He is below in the shrubbery. I will call him now," and he moved toward the window. "Ah, you may brave it out a little longer, but the paint shall be washed from your face and washes shall restore your hair to its natural color, and before your trial you shall be as you were months ago in looks. Murderess! Do you know that the scaffold awaits you?"

He called loudly from the window.

At the same moment, the false Miss Bermyngham, the real Liliias Voe, drew her hand from her pocket and put it to her mouth. See crunched the transparent globule between her small teeth, an odd smile on her rose-red lips.

"Lady Folliott," she said, turning to the affrighted and bewildered baroness, "it's all true. I am Liliias Voe, the murderess! But I never harmed your niece. She died of heart-disease. It is she who was buried as Agatha Walden. I killed Caspar Voe. He meant to give me up to the law. I have been a bad woman, but I swear I never harmed Miss Bermyngham. I—I Hyslop I have cheated you after all!"

Her painted face wore a sudden glow of triumph; then her features grew distorted and she fell to the floor.

When Lambton picked her up she was dead.

They buried her in the churchyard at Folliott Fens, beside her murdered husband.

The body of the real Miss Bermyngham was dis-

interred, and deposited in the sombre Bermyngham vaults among her kindred. Sir Lionel Charlton inherited the fortune which Lilius Voe had usurped, and very soon afterward the young baronet and Beatrix, his wife, and Lady Folliott, departed for a lengthened tour upon the Continent, to forget, in travel, the terrible experiences of the past few months. But they did not go until Beatrix had testified her gratitude in various ways to all those who had befriended her, including faithful, grim Esther, the Trevor Farm housekeeper, and poor Jones, the farm-laborer, who had been rescued by his fellow-servants on their return from Bala.

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